



Good WOOD

David Price talks to Eddie Spruit and Alester Kells about how a career as a lawyer went slightly off course, leading to the setting up of Quadraspire

Life is what you make it, and Eddie Spruit is living proof of this. Had he followed his planned career path, he would be in London now, dispensing law on behalf of corporate multinationals. A student of the School of Oriental and African Studies, young Edward's major was in the economics of China and Japan. Then on graduating, he decided to do a conversion course to become a lawyer, and found himself working for Pfizer pharmaceuticals, as you do.

"The reason I went there," he tells me, "is that they wanted a part-time lawyer, and this let me take a little time off to pursue my hobby, which was – and is – cabinet making". Eddie duly did, and soon realised, "it was more interesting studying law than practicing it. The guys there – the partners – looked old for their age and were doing silly hours. I thought, life is too short. I wanted to do what I wanted to do, and cabinet making was my passion!"

He began renting a workshop in London's East End, and started making one-off pieces of furniture. "This was 1992, and I realised

that if I was going to leave law, I needed a steady income, and had to do a product that would give me cash flow. With one-off stuff, you never know how long it will take, how many you are going to be doing in a year, so I started to make little jewellery boxes in the shape of a sail. With some friends we would rent a shop off Oxford Street for six weeks or so before Christmas, selling all kinds of

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designer stuff. I developed a little display stand using aluminium columns and triangular curved shelves. After about the third year, a guy setting up a hi-fi shop came in and suggested I did a rack..."

At the time, Eddie was doing a special commission for someone. A solid cherry desk, six feet by three feet, it had extreme curves and was an interesting shape. "So I

thought, I'll use that shape to make my shelf," he remembers. "I came up with a prototype very close to what ended up being the Q4. The guys thought it was good, but said that I should take it to Graham's hi-fi shop. They said that they already had enough racks, but we got talking and after a while suggested I drop mine off because they were doing an assessment. A week later they phoned me up and said mine was the best of all they had tested, and that they wanted to recommend it to their customers."

Big in Japan

Eddie was making them in small batches, and looking for a subcontractor to mass produce them. His dream was to use this to let him leave his law job completely, and then he could settle down to do his bespoke furniture. Then in 1996 Malcolm Steward did a review in *Hi-Fi Choice* and, "it just took off from there, basically", he remembers. One thing led to another, and he got exports, then Linn Products asked him to supply racks for its factory and shows. This introduced him to a Japanese distributor

THREE'S COMPANY

The current Quadraspire range comprises the Q4 EVO, SVT and X REF. All are carefully shaped so that they store as little energy as possible. As the range progresses up in price, more work is done to guarantee superior isolating properties. I got the chance to make direct A-B comparisons between the three Quadraspire ranges, as well as hearing the difference between the standard aluminium columns and the Bronze spike upgrade pack. Listening tests were made with the kind help of Audio T of Bristol (audiot.co.uk/storefinder/bristol/), using a £30,000 system comprising a Naim NDS/555 streamer (£13,925), Bryston BP26/4B SST pre-power amplifier (£8,925) and PMC twenty.26 loudspeakers (£5,750) – with the Naim streamer being moved directly from each Quadraspire rack to the next.

The Q4 EVO rack delivered a good sound; the system sounded crisp and smooth with a pleasingly rhythmic nature. There was very little to object to, it presented as a well chosen system that was able to perform to a high level. When an extra tier was added with the bronze spike upgrade, the sound changed to a surprising degree. It was as if a layer of noise had been stripped out, revealing more pronounced spaces between the notes. This gave a more dynamic sound, one that carried the rhythmic accents of music far more clearly. It also seemed to improve the timing quite markedly. For example, on the Rolling Stones' *Beast Of Burden* it was far easier to hear drummer Charlie Watts playing ever so slightly off the beat, giving it a wonderfully loose and human feel. Before, the music seemed a little more opaque and the rhythms and dynamics less pronounced. It was a surprisingly profound improvement, considering its modest nature.

Moving to the SVT was less surprising. The sound got slightly better, with a marginally stronger and more articulate bass, and a slight smoothing of the upper midband. It was a useful upgrade, but less significant than the first change. The music flowed better, had a greater sense of ease and seemed fractionally larger in scale; certainly things at the back of the recorded acoustic got a little better defined. Finally, moving to the X REF was dramatic; greater even in scale than the first change to the Bronze spikes, it was like moving from CD to hi-res. The sound was larger still, significantly deeper and seemingly less caught inside the speakers. Tonally the recording seemed less brittle and yet more detail came forth; it was even possible to hear a hi-hat cymbal that had been previously lost in the mix. The most palpable improvement was the focus and insight; strands in the mix now played independently of one another and this gave the music so much more life. As significant as any cable upgrade I have come across, it brought a far more nuanced and insightful sound.



Quadraspire's entry-level Q4 EVO (left) flagship X REF (centre) and mid-price SVT (right)



One of Quadraspire's high-precision automated cutting machines



Everything from wood cutting to power coating metal is done in the factory

contractors, and wanted to move his production inhouse. "I moved to the West Country and started the factory from scratch. It was a long journey; never having done manufacturing before, it was a lot to learn!"

Eddie loves designing, but his focus has always been to keep supplying his customers, he confides. "Trying to be reliable, supplying within the timeframe, keeping to a certain standard, because there's no point cutting corners." This has stood the company in good stead, but it hasn't been a cakewalk. One problem he has faced is keeping his range in check; Quadraspire has at various points done quite a bewildering range of hi-fi racks, and for

It's still amazing when you go to hi-fi shows to see manufacturers stack their kit on cheap stands

this reason he has recently decided to slim things down to the Q4 EVO (the entry-level product in Cherry, £110 per tier), SVT (premium range in Bamboo, £280 per tier) and now X REF (flagship design, £1,000 per tier). There is also the option of the new Bronze upgrade package, which replaces the standard power coated aluminium spikes with carefully selected and machined bronze metalwork. This costs an extra £200 on the Q4 EVO, and £400 on the SVT.

"The aim with this was to come up with something that is pleasing to the eye in the home, but really competes on sonic terms with the really expensive designs." There's also a custom build service; "We can make racks to customers' individual requirements – so if you need longer, wider, deeper,



thicker, whatever, we can do it." This is only possible because everything is made at the company's large factory just outside of Bath, and not in China by an OEM manufacturer.

Eddie says his business has grown strongly thanks to Japan, which is a market that understands the importance of hi-fi supports. "They just naturally get it. In many countries the thing you place your system on is seen as ▶

INSIDER FEATURE QUADRASPIRE

Eddie Spruit celebrates the original 'quadraspire' corner table



A sneak peek of the new bamboo speaker stands coming soon

BOOPLINTH

"This is made from solid bamboo. In its natural form it is almost as light as beech or maple, but when you heat the bamboo so the sugar inside melts a bit, you get a caramel look. It is pure bamboo, cut into thin rectangular strips, and laminated together side by side to create a sheet. This is cross laminated together for a kind of plywood effect. We machine from that, now to create the Booplith – we cut the panels roughly to size then glue them together using special hard glue to get the thickness, and then we machine it out of that one piece of bamboo. It's not so bad machining 20mm bamboo, but when you machine 66mm bamboo like this, it's very hard wearing on the tool and the machine!" The Booplith company sell it for £1,650 including fitting.

booplith.com



The new Booplith for the Linn LP12 is beautifully made by Quadraspire

an irrelevance, or at best an aesthetic choice. But the Japanese know that supports can have a dramatic effect on the sound. It's a message I haven't needed to push out there."

In the UK, despite getting some excellent dealers on side and his very helpful *Hi-Fi Choice* review some two decades ago, he has encountered resistance. Many people don't think hi-fi supports play an active part in the sound quality of their system, and those that do have traditionally thought metal and glass supports are the best. I put it to Product Engineer Alester Kells that this is a little odd, given the propensity of both to resonate. Surely what is needed is a structure that is light but doesn't store energy, rather than a heavy one that rings?

Wood you believe it

After studying at Central St Martins, Alester graduated with a degree in Product Design and is passionate about his day job, which also happens to be a hobby too. "A lot of people were a bit sceptical about the original Quadraspire rack. They thought it didn't have much substance to it, and wondered if it was really going to work. The market was all about glass and steel, but it wasn't and isn't the answer. Rather, wood is an excellent material and comes in so many variants, all with differing strengths and damping properties. Since the sound of a hi-fi system is affected by ground and air-borne vibration, the way that energy travels through a rack has a big effect. It's mechanical, we know this."

Given that people have known that speaker stands have their own sound for the past 30 years, why does Alester think so many believe that precisely the same thing at the other end of the playback chain cannot possibly make a difference? "It's about

getting across the idea that a good hi-fi support will cost a lot of money, but will make your system right. It will let you get more from all of the other products you have invested in. By not having your system set up properly, then you might as well be throwing that money away, because you are not going to make the most of that system."

Having not worked in hi-fi manufacturing until recently, Alester recalls his horror at going to hi-fi shows around the world and seeing just how cavalier many companies are about system supports. "It's still amazing when you go to hi-fi shows and see major electronics manufacturers with their kit

In 1996 a good review appeared in HFC, one thing led to another and it just took off from there

stacked up, box on top of box, on some cheap Ikea coffee table or suchlike. At the recent Munich High End Show there were some really big names – including, amazingly, a speaker manufacturer – paying no serious attention to this part of the system. Some of the stands looked pretty, but the kit was turned off, it was doing its job – and not very well."

Quadraspire is passionate about the virtues of wood in all its myriad forms then, and is a recent convert to bamboo – a material both Eddie and Alester think is superb for audio applications. Eddie explains: "One of the companies that we spray wood for, came along in 2010. It was an importer of bamboo sheets from China, and we decided to try some samples. We machined a Q4 EVO from bamboo and compared the two blind. It was

clearly better than the veneered MDF, which itself is a really good platform. It's a fantastic material and we have got a really good response. Indeed if I had known about it 20 years ago, I wonder if I would ever have used veneers – probably just bamboo in three or four different finishes."

Prepare to be bamboozled

One thing led to another, and Quadraspire is now getting ever more serious about this marvellous material. There is a new speaker stand, combining bamboo uprights and Nextel-covered top and bottom plates, out this autumn, and the company has collaborated with a highly respected Manchester-based Linn dealer to make the Booplith, a bamboo plinth for the Linn Sondek LP12 turntable. There's even a set of bamboo wall brackets, too. It's so strong that it is very difficult to machine, and wears out tools quickly, but its structure, and the fact that it has so much air inside it, makes it ideal for audio applications, he tells me.

Perhaps the company's most important product is the flagship X REF, which builds on the SVT rack. It too is a low-mass design with curved shelves and no parallel lines; this breaks up standing waves and avoids storing energy. The new rack uses more extreme curves and mass is further reduced, with special grooving on the underside to minimise resonance. It has laminated bamboo shelving and is coated in Nextel for sound deadening. Its edges are more acute than normal to lower weight and assist energy dissipation, and small conical bronze spike locators hold the shelf in place. "It's a whole new market for us," says Alester, "with a whole new level of care and attention, but that's what we have always been about" ● quadraspire.co.uk