

## Ayon Polaris III with Regenerator Power Supply \$28,629

Like its companion monoblock amplifier, the Vulcan II, the 6H30-tube-based Polaris linestage from the Austrian high-end manufacturer Ayon (with Ayon's fully tube-rectified outboard "Regenerator" power supply) offers the signature Ayon sound of huge sonic panoramas, silky black-velvet backgrounds, and gobs of natural detail. A superior performer, said reviewer PB, with lifelike density to its images and large sonic landscapes, the Polaris III produces a veritable IMAX panorama of three-dimensional sound. [ayonaudiousa.com](http://ayonaudiousa.com) (208)

## Audio Research Reference 10 \$30,000

The extremely short-lived Reference Fortieth Anniversary unit aside, it has been decades since ARC offered a two-box (separate power supply) preamplifier. This handsomely restyled, remote-controllable linestage—with an entirely new built-in touchscreen interface—adds better than twice the power-supply capacitance to the already superb circuit of ARC's Reference 5SE. The results, as might be expected, are large steps forward in dynamics, resolution, bass grip and definition, and soundstage dimensionality (better in this regard than any other preamp JV has auditioned). But the midrange is the Ref 10's true glory. Here it is capable of reproducing the timbres of instruments and vocalists with a realism that *no* other preamp can match. The only downside to this unit (and this has been the case since ARC switched over to massive Teflon capacitors) is that break-in takes forever (600 hours at least). Until then you will have to put up with less-than-ideal sonics. [audioresearch.com](http://audioresearch.com) (Review forthcoming)

## D'Agostino Momentum \$32,000

So visually attractive you might buy it as a piece of sculpture, the D'Agostino Momentum preamp's real merit is its extraordinary sound, which seemingly combines the sweetness of the best tube preamps and the detail and accuracy of the best solid-state designs, making it one of the few preamplifiers that can reproduce all the warmth and romance of the best recordings. If the recording is good enough, you hear a remarkably natural, articulated, and three-dimensional soundstage, which seems to expand in width and depth without stretching the instruments or voices within it. Images are not only more precise, they are also placed more realistically in the third dimension. The Momentum has all the features, remote-control capabilities, and input options needed in a top preamp—even truly functional tone controls! [dagostinoinc.com](http://dagostinoinc.com) (239)

## CH Precision C1 DAC/Preamplifier From \$32,975

The C1 is a uniquely flexible control center that can accommodate all kinds of digital inputs: SPDIF, USB, streaming PCM or DSD, and DSD from SACDs via the proprietary CH-Link between the C1 and its companion D1 CD/SACD transport. An excellent, optional analog input board is also available. The C1 creates magnificent colors (but never euphony), dynamic fireworks (without overshoot), startling transients (minus any edginess), and jump-up-and-dance rhythms (with zero slop). Nor are spatiality and resolution slighted. The C1 also reproduces every dynamic, timbral, and rhythmic flux. Although you can hear every little thing in the mix, details come together organically—as they do in real life. The C1's performance with data streamed from a NAS drive deserves special mention for stripping away the glaze that is all but unavoidable with USB. Best used with balanced inputs and outputs. [ch-precision.com](http://ch-precision.com) (239)

## Siltech C1 \$37,500

The companion piece to Siltech's two-stage SAGA System amplifier—the V1/P1 combo—the C1 is a battery-charged, tube-powered linestage preamplifier of extraordinary sonic sophistication. Extremely fast, minutely detailed, and powerfully dynamic like the best solid-state, it also boasts one of the most realistic (and beautiful) tonal palettes JV has heard, with the gorgeous timbre, extremely lifelike texture, and natural bloom of the finest tubes. Perhaps the most successful hybrid (tube/solid-state) preamp/amp combo in ultra-high-end history, the SAGA System has already garnered raves from other audio reviewers. It is certainly a complete package that anyone shopping in this swan-like neck of the high-end woods needs to audition before considering other contenders. BTW, it comes with a very cool touch-screen remote control. All that's missing now is a SAGA System phonostage. Along with the Soullution 520/725, the Constellation Virgo 2, the Zanden 3100, and the new ARC Reference 10, one of JV's current references. [audioplusservices.com](http://audioplusservices.com) (239)

## Pass Labs Xs \$38,000

The Xs is an all-out challenge to the state of the art, and to every other preamp available. Wayne Colburn and Nelson Pass have truly outdone themselves in producing this massive two-unit linestage. It does every aspect of sound quality right, and is incredibly revealing of musical and soundstage detail. Reviewer AHC could not find any flaws even in comparison with other top preamps; plus the Xs's extraordinarily low noise floor and natural, detailed deep bass have few, if any rivals. Male and female voice are excellent, open, and natural. Complex organ passages are exceptionally clean, and so are complex orchestral dynamics, opera, recordings of large jazz bands. Form follows functional styling, excellent features, and good ergonomics in this preampifier. AHC's current reference. [passlabs.com](http://passlabs.com) (243)

## LAMM LL1 \$42,790

This four-chassis, dual-mono preamplifier is that rare breed that strikes a near-perfect balance between transient attack and instrumental body, and does so from top to bottom in both frequency response and amplitude. Its ability to deliver speed plus sustain at all dynamic levels is extraordinary. The result, said reviewer PB, is near-perfect timbre and, if the rest of your system is up to it, nearly ideal imaging. [lamindustries.com](http://lamindustries.com) (208)

## Boulder 2110 \$54,000

Boulder's 2110 preamplifier is a technological tour de force. It comprises four modules, two for the power supply and two for the linestage, that help to ensure amazing image stability, subterranean bass, and gossamer-like highs. Timbres have tremendous weight and heft, coupled with a delicious pellucidity that sets it apart from other preamps. Its fully balanced operation banishes any hint of hum. Nothing extraneous ever seems to intrude upon musical reproduction as the 2110 effortlessly delivers transient attacks with unerring accuracy. The 2110 lacks the final degree of fluidity of tube preamps, but its low noise floor, mellifluous tonality, and stupendous control mean that it resides at the peak of solid-state designs. [boulderamp.com](http://boulderamp.com) (Review forthcoming)