

A close-up, low-angle shot of the front panel of a silver Perreaux integrated amplifier. The brand name 'PERREAUX' is embossed in a serif font on the lower part of the panel. Below the name is a small, circular logo. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic texture and the embossed text against a dark background.

PERREAUX

Perreaux Éloquence 150i Integrated Amplifier

New Zealand's Perreaux squeezes bona-fide high-end performance out of a lifestyle friendly integrated amplifier.

By Steve Guttenberg



It was close to 30 years ago, but I remember my first encounter with a Perreaux amplifier. I was a salesman at an up-and-coming high-end shop in New York City, and we didn't carry either of the two big selling solid-state lines of the time, Mark Levinson or Threshold. The Perreaux factory rep dropped off a PMF 2150 and I thought it looked the part. Then we hooked it up to a pair of Snell Type A speakers and the sound was spectacularly clean and beautifully balanced. We took on the line and did really well with it.

Over the decades, I've lost touch with Perreaux, so I was eager to get my hands on their new Éloquence 150i and was thrilled to see it wasn't just another integrated amplifier.

First, as high-end integrations go, it's downright compact, just 16.7 inches wide, 3.9 inches high and 14.3 inches deep. That makes it a bit smaller than your average A/V receiver. At 32 pounds, it's heavier than most 7 x 100-watt receivers. Most \$5,000-plus high-end integrations are huge things, but the Éloquence 150i is small enough to recommend to your non-audiophile pals. Running my fingers over its beautifully finished, 5/8-inch thick front panel and solid-metal volume control there was no doubt: the amp is the real deal.

Elegant Éloquence

The Éloquence 150i is a Class AB design that delivers 150 watts per channel into 8 ohm loads, and 300 watts into 4 ohms; it's got what it takes to drive even inefficient speakers such as my Magnepan 3.6/Rs. The amp uses MOSFET output devices, and as I recall, so did that first Perreaux I listened to. The new amp's heat sinks never got more than mildly warm, even after I cranked it for hours on end.

Perreaux also breaks the mold by offering two rather useful options for the Éloquence 150i: a moving-magnet/moving-coil phono preamp (\$595) and a Burr Brown 24 bit/192 kHz digital-to-analog upsampling converter (\$1,000). Best of all, you can add either option *after* purchasing the amp.

The 1.25-inch by 2.5-inch front-panel display keeps you informed about input selection and volume level, and you can name each input as you like. For example, you could name Input 1 as Sirius, Input 2 as Pandora, etc. Various functions are accessible via the menu system. Navigation is so easy and straightforward, I didn't have to study the owner's manual to get the job done. You can turn the display off from the remote, which is good because even at its dimmest setting, it's too distracting during evening listening sessions. You also can program a maximum-volume level, handy if a lot of people use your system. *(continued)*



The Éloquence 150i is multiroom/custom installation ready. It has one trigger output, one external IR input and one IR output, all with 3.5 mm jacks.

The rear panel's connectivity quotient is fairly generous. There's one pair of balanced XLR inputs, four pair of unbalanced RCA inputs, and one pair each of balanced and unbalanced outputs. The DAC has two coax (BNC) inputs, two optical (Toslink), and one USB input. The binding posts handle fairly heavyweight speaker cables without complaint.

The Éloquence 150i is multiroom/custom installation ready. It has one trigger output, one external IR input and one IR output, all with 3.5 mm jacks. The RS232 serial port is provided for use with AMX, Control4, and Crestron home-automation systems. There's even a home-theater/pass-through loop for easy integration with home-theater systems.

If those automation doodads make you wonder about Perreux's audiophile street cred, check this out: while the amp is shipped with four supporting feet, you can reconfigure them for more-stable three-foot support. Tweaky!

Gripes: The plastic remote's little bump "buttons" broke the high-end spell every time I used it. For the kind of dough the Éloquence 150i commands, I'd want a more substantial remote. It worked well enough, though the centrally placed

source and volume control bumps were easily mixed up. I can't tell you how many times I changed inputs when attempting to change the volume.

Each Éloquence 150i is shipped with a set of measurements taken during final quality-control testing at Perreux's factory in New Zealand. The company has an outstanding reputation for reliability.

Listen to That

There's something about the way the Éloquence 150i let me hear the spaces between instruments that immediately grabbed my attention. Some might say it focuses a soundstage better than an integrated amplifier has any right to. Or is it just this amp's superior transparency, low-level detailing or microdynamics? I'm not sure. Whatever you call it, the Éloquence 150i has it in spades. It's also a lot of fun to listen to.

Take the newly remastered Beatles *Revolver* CD. Paul McCartney's bass was extra bouncy and nimble on "Taxman," and Paul's (not George's) guitar freakout kicked butt. The new CD sounds surprisingly analog-like, so much so that I compared it with my *Revolver* LP, and the CD was a close match. *(continued)*



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"In fact, I could easily live with the 840C at the front end of my \$100K reference system – it's that good."

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Yes, the vinyl sounds a tad more three-dimensional, but tonally, CD and LP are in the same ballpark. I didn't intend to listen to all of *Sgt. Pepper*, but once I started I couldn't stop. The amp must be doing something right.

The Éloquence 150i is a master of space and time.

Play a well-recorded jazz CD, such as a Chesky, and you hear the room in which the band was recorded in. Treble is grainless, delicate and nuanced.

Thing is, all that groovy audiophile stuff like transparency and air have to be in the recording before the Éloquence 150i can reproduce them. I was thinking about that when I played Booker T's recent *Potato Hole* CD. Booker, of Booker T and the MGs fame, still mans a mean keyboard and on his new CD he's backed up by the Drive By Truckers and Neil Young. But the sound is as dead as the proverbial doornail. Booker's funk is still kicking, but this nasty sounding recording puts a lid on it.

This soundstage is flatter than Kansas, dynamic range is MIA, and the worst kind of digital glare infects the midrange and top-end. So there's not much the Éloquence 150i can do to make *Potato Hole* go down easy. It's not a miracle worker, so if your musical tastes run to mostly contemporary production heavy rock or pop, the Éloquence 150i's innate transparency might not be what the doctor ordered.

Ah, but pop on one of Mr. Booker's juicy Stax era record workouts from the 1960s, and the Éloquence 150i will plaster a big smile across your puss. *(continued)*

Straight outta Brooklyn, Oakley Hall's *I'll Follow You* CD reminds me of X (the band that is), specifically, their early albums *Los Angeles* and *Wild Gift*. Oakley Hall's Patrick Sullivan and Rachel Cox's dueling lead vocals have a lot to do with that. They raise goose bumps at least a couple of times per song. And the way Oakley Hall's melodic tunes develop and sway, they're a throwback to an earlier time.

Listening over the Éloquence 150i, this CD's wider than average dynamic range exploded over my Magnepan 3.6/R speakers, and you know what they say about Maggies: they need a bit of juice to really come alive. The Éloquence 150i has a rock n' roll heart beating inside that compact chassis.

I played a couple of DVD videos, listening to their LPCM stereo mixes over the Éloquence 150i. Cream's *Royal Albert Hall 2005* sounded big and bold as Jack Bruce's bass and Ginger Baker's drums laid down massive grooves. Eric Clapton doesn't have the fire he did way back when, but his sound was first rate.

LP sound was good, if veering to the lean side of neutral with my van den Hul Frog moving-coil cartridge. As they say, your mileage might vary. No matter, the funk-a-licious *Tom Tom Club* LP set my toes a tappin'. Vinyl was more alive than digital, that's for sure. Bass transients were lightning fast, and considering the nature of the music, the soundstage was huge. It's been a while since I heard this 1981 recording, and it's a lot better than I remember it.

I finished up with another LP, The Cowboy Junkies' *Trinity Revisited* from 2006. The new record had a tighter, more-focused sound, but it was brighter and dimensionally flatter in the ways that many contemporary recordings are. Not that I blame the Éloquence 150i one bit for that; it was just telling it like it is. If you're looking for an amp that makes everything sound pretty, keep looking. This ain't it.

The Éloquence 150i tells the truth, no matter what. That's what I like about it. ●

The Éloquence 150i has a rock n' roll heart beating inside that compact chassis.



The Perreux Éloquence 150i Integrated Amplifier
MSRP: \$5,495

MANUFACTURER

www.perreux.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source VPI Classic turntable with a van den Hul Frog cartridge

Digital Sources Ayre C-5xe, Pioneer DV-45A players, Apple Mac Mini

Speakers Dynaudio C-1, Mangepan MG 3.6/R

Cable XLO Signature-3 interconnects, speaker cable, and power cords