

Perreaux R200i

Review by: Mikkel Gige [20.09.2007]

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<http://www.hifi4all.dk/content/templates/anmeldelser.asp?articleid=1652&zoneid=3>

At HIFI4ALL we often get inspired by our colleagues around the World. I came across the Perreaux R200i, which has received many great reviews. It is currently placed in my listening room, and I am looking forward to hear if it is as good, as our colleagues have written.

Perreaux is located in New Zealand on the other side of the globe, and they have been building hifi products since 1974. The production has been concentrated mainly on amplifiers, but in the last few years, they have added digital products to the line up.

R200i is not a brand new amplifier, but it has been upgraded in several areas compared to the first version. Amongst others, Perreaux has chosen to make the capacitors smaller, in favour of a type that delivers the current faster. There are now 4 capacitors with a total of 22.400 μf per channel, opposite to the previous 40.000 μf per channel. It is no longer possible to upgrade the R200i with a build-in RIAA and USB DAC. Perreaux state, that they cannot produce these in a quality that matches the rest of the amplifier, so instead they have chosen to upgrade the RIAA and USB DAC separate in the Silhouette series.



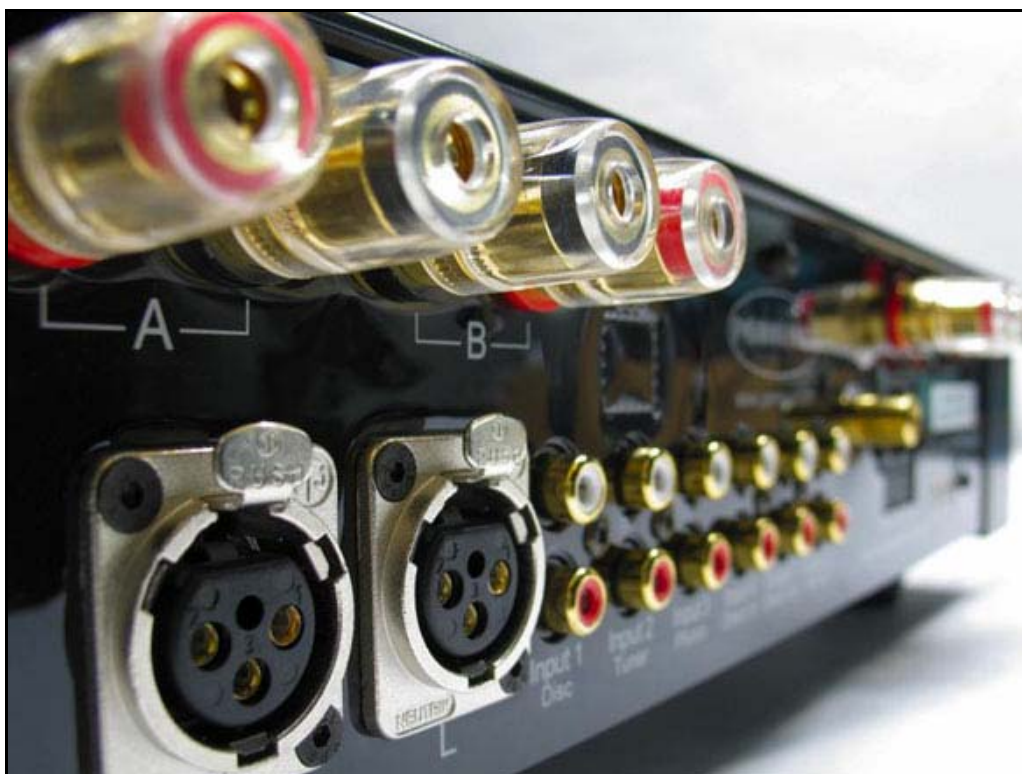
Perreaux R200i flanked by half a kilo of remote control.

The power supply in this relatively physically small amplifier is heavily dimensioned. The power section is 100 % dual mono and has two toroidal transformers specified at 400VA, the before mentioned bank of capacitors together with 6 Powerful Mos-Fet transistors per channel. There is a smaller separate toroidal in the back of the preamplifier and the control circuits. The internal composition and construction is very nice indeed, and the quality of the components is generally high.



Power reserve.

At the back there is a multiple choice of connections. There are three RCA inputs, an input for the power section, a fixed output (tape out), and a variable output from the preamplifier section, and therefore possible to use the R200i as a separate pre- or power amplifier. There is also a balanced input with a pair of nice Neutrik XLRs, however this input is not truly balanced. The signal is converted into regular single ended by a small circuit right behind the nice XLR plugs. It is now possible for the signal to be used by the amplifier, which is not a truly balanced construction from the start. Some may say a piece of commercial rubbish, but in the US it is almost impossible to sell a high end product without a balanced input. Regular non-balanced high end products are almost considered unserious "over there", so I cannot blame Perreaux for including the balanced input. If you want maximum sound from this amplifier, you have to use the RCA-input, but I will write more about that further on in the listening section. Speaking of RCA-inputs, the plugs look nice from the outside, but on the inside the plugs look cheap, placed in two plastic blocks with 3 x 2 plugs each, along with the fact that there is no gold on the center leg of the plugs. Welcome corrosion - a weird place to save a buck or two on an amplifier worth 10.500,- US \$. There are also two pairs of speaker terminals in a WBT-like quality.



Abundance of connections!



Why save on the quality of the intern site of the connections on a power amp priced 10.500,-
US \$?

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At the front, the R200i is dominated by the beautiful silky smooth aluminum front, and it happens to be so soft to the touch that I had to restrain myself from lifting the amplifier up to stroke it against my cheek! Every time I manually wanted to control the amplifier with the buttons in the small window on the front, I would end up embracing the soft front gently... with the backside of my hand of course! I did not have the heart to smother the front with my fingertips. The front is made out of either natural aluminum or shiny black, similar to piano lacquer. The number of buttons on R220i is kept to a minimum, and they are all placed within the small ellipse-shaped window. There is a button for on/off, two buttons for the volume, and the last two are for the menu. Using this menu, one can make all sorts of settings, but the most exciting gimmick is that you can see the temperature on the cooling profiles. Nice!



Temperature of operation.

Speaking of temperature, it is just one of the five different safety circuits built into the R200i. If the temperature rises above 85 degrees, the amplifier shuts down until the temperature has dropped to an acceptable level. If the signal is clipping, the amplifier automatically turns down the volume, turning it slowly up again afterwards, and doing so until the signal stops clipping. I could go on. The fact is that you have to be violent to blow this amplifier up otherwise it is impossible.

The top is neither aluminum nor steel, but black acryl. It is by far the worst dust magnet I have ever stumbled upon. Literally speaking, the top was covered in dust two seconds after it had been dusted. It was charged with static electricity each time I tried to remove the dust with a soft cloth, and oh boy did the dust like that. Black acryl looks good, but is impractical. It is non magnetic of course, but it does not prevent noise from getting to the circuits. How about clear acryl, when it has to be acryl? Then one would enjoy the view of the inside?



With the hood off!

The remote control almost deserves a review of its own. It is made out of a solid block of cast zinc, and is shaped to a monoque, in the same silky smooth finish as the front of the amplifier. On the top yet another piece of black acryl is to be found, held by four screws. It is also the only access to the batteries. It controls all the functions on the amplifier, with direct choice of some special functions, such as the temperature reading. It is also made to control a future CD-player and radio. Who does not know what it means to have scratched backsides on remote controls, when they get shoved around on the coffee table? Perreaux solved the problem by putting four small rubber feet underneath, each placed in their own little recess. There are also light in some of the buttons, to confirm that a button has been pushed. To mention the remote control's weight: it is undoubtedly the heaviest remote control I have ever held in my hand. Approx. 450 gram or almost half a kilo! Bang & Olufsen, go home!

Listening session:

There is absolutely no doubt; this is high end! Perreaux R200i can do things with music, which cannot be done with an amplifier at a lower price. There are a lot of amplifiers that give you better precision and perspective, more details, tighter bass etc., but you can hardly find an amp, even at the same or higher price, that delivers the same presence!

At one point during the review, the Perreaux was playing some gentle cello suites, while I was sitting in the other end of the house. Even though there were two rooms between me and the

listening room, I was convinced that Pierre Fournier was actually sitting in my listening room, playing his cello. I thought: "Such a realism and presence can hardly come from electronics", but it was the Perreaux. Such a force and drama! It is one of those things that make the R200i so special.

You can easily find an amplifier that gives you a tighter bass and is more open at the top, but when it comes to the wide middle range, a little into the upper bass and the lower treble, the R200i is definitely in the top range. World class! I even dare to say that you would have to acquire a very expensive tube amplifier to find something that can do it marginally better. This is Mos-Fet the groovy way.

Even though I mention that the bass is tighter on other amplifiers, it is not much. The bass drum still stands out and kicks you in the stomach, the bass guitar does not stand a chance to be blurring around; each note stands clearly out on its own, and this is what makes the Perreaux such a special amplifier to listen to. Every time a new instrument is added to the music, the R200i just adds a new layer that clearly stands out from the other layers that already are present in the music. This is airy bass at it's best. It rarely becomes more detailed than this.

The middle range is where the miracle happens. This is pure "layer cake", in the sense that you easily can see/hear each layer in the middle range, as well as you see them in a slice of layer cake on a plate. Voices completely stand out from the music, and you almost feel like reaching out to touch the singer. There is a ton of details that all want to get out, and they are all allowed to. One, two or a thousand details at once, the Perreaux could not care less. They all get out in the right time and in the right place. There is a very rare natural approach to the Perreaux's way of serving this wide middle range. This is where most instruments, incl. the human voice, has the main pitch, so it is quite a natural place to focus on, to get it as correct as possible.

During the review I also used the Perreaux as a separate pre- and power amplifier. It was easy to hear the power section's influence on the wide middle range with its Mos-Fet transistors. The preamplifier on the other hand was very neutral in that sense. It was absolutely on level with the Audio Analogue Bellini, with precision and complete control of everything. The power section on its own has a very warm reproduction with a somewhat bombastic and warm bass and an easily heard rounded top. But the middle range... Wow! The fact that the final output is not a terrible blur of marmalade, has to be credited the preamplifier-section. The precision and control holds back the bass, and lets the treble stretch a bit further towards the top.

But it does not stretch as far as one would expect from an amplifier in the price level. The highest treble still lacks some air, but besides this, the Revelator treble-units in the reference speakers get to deliver their very best. Cymbals are somewhat rounded, but still stands clearly out in the sound picture.

The perspective is a story of its own... Wait one moment; I have not heard The Magic Flute yet... I am back! Wow – again. What a presence and realism. There is simply so much music coming through here. Not at any point was I in doubt of my seat in the theater, while I was listening to The Magic Flute. This is among one of the best sound experiences I have ever had. We are way up high together with the Jeff Rowland Concerto. There are no limits, lots of depth, lots of height, and finally lots of width. Everything is placed precisely in the sound picture, and it is easy to hear the difference within distance to the singers on the stage. In all three dimensions! Instruments also clearly have their positions. As our old editor once wrote;



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"You feel like getting up from your chair, stepping into the "room" behind the speakers, to sit down among the musicians". This is how good it sounds. Wow – and that is the third time!

One last detail I also mentioned earlier: Use regular RCA-cables with the Perreaux. The balanced input steals some of the good sound; the bass loses some weight and details, the top loses some of the air that is there, and finally the balanced input also steals some of the excellent dynamics. All small details, but once you have noticed it, there is no going back: RCA-cables!

Conclusion:

Perreaux R200i is absolutely "Top Class", but it does not reach "Editors Choice". The sound is too colored, and it is in a price level that limits its distribution the market. The two competitors Jeff Rowland Concerto and Ayre AX-7e, are both more precise and neutral. On top of that, Ayre only costs half the money.

R200i is for people who like "music". You can easily get better "technique" with better precision and control, but you will not get the same presence. The presence is R200i's great force. You are *in* the music, and not just as listeners with an expensive setup. That is why one would choose to live with the R200i.

Specifications:

Output: 2 x 200 watt, 8 ohm. 2 x 360 watt, 4 ohm.

Max. peak current: 60 A.

Dampening factor: 2000 at 8 ohm.

Dimensions: 43 x 10 x 34 cm (B x H x D).

Weight: 13.5 kg.

Price: 10.500, - US \$.

Danish Distributor:

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Reference-equipment:

- Lyngdorf CD-1, CD-player
- Audio Analogue Bellini, Preamplifier
- Nakamichi PA5 MKII, Power amplifier
- Xavian XN360, Speakers
- Silver Sonic Revelation and Q10, cables
- 230V filter, DIY

Listening Room:

The listening Room is rectangular, just below 20 m². The system plays towards the short direction of the room, with the speakers 2 meters apart, half a meter from the rear wall, and 2 meters from the speakers to the listening position. The room is subdued with absorbents from Foamzorb.

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