

# Perreaux's minimalist minis

Perreaux Silhouette SXD2 USB DAC module

Perreaux Silhouette SX25i integrated amplifier

## TECH SPECS

### Perreaux SXD2 USB DAC module

**Sample frequency range:** 32kHz–192kHz

**THD:** 0.01% @1kHz

**Signal to noise ratio:** (A-weighted) 113dB

**Frequency response:** 20Hz–20kHz (+/-0.1dB)

**Inputs:** 1 x coaxial, 1 x USB

**Outputs:** 1 x pair RCA stereo (unbalanced)

**Dimensions (w/h/d):** 216 x 58 x 169mm

**Weight:** 1.5kg

Anyone familiar with the SXV1 phono stage (see >>FFWD Aug/Sept 2003) or SXH2 headphone amp (see >>FFWD Dec 2004/Jan 2005) will know what to expect from Perreaux's Silhouette range, so it comes as no surprise that these two latest Silhouette products continue the theme set by their forebears. Viewed from the front, each Silhouette component sports a handsome 6mm machined aluminium front plate with a milled Perreaux insignia and, well, that's about it, save for a tiny blue LED that indicates the unit's power status.

Other than a volume control, the SX25i is about as feature free as an integrated amplifier gets. On the rear panel you'll find a single pair of RCA inputs, matching RCA outputs and speaker binding posts. That's yer lot. Remote control? Nope. Balance and tone controls? Fat chance.

If the feature count is frugal, the SX25i makes up for it with the class of the components under its hood. High-quality Wima and Elna capacitors grace the circuit board while a fully shielded

## TECH SPECS

### Perreaux SX25i integrated amplifier

**Power rating:** 25 watts per channel (8 ohms)

**THD:** <0.02% (20Hz–20kHz)

**Frequency response:** 20Hz–20kHz (+/-0.25dB) 5Hz–60kHz (+/-1.0dB)

**Inputs:** 1 x pair RCA stereo (unbalanced)

**Outputs:** 1 x pair RCA stereo (unbalanced), 2 x pairs speaker terminals

**Remote control:** No

**Headphone socket:** No

**Dimensions (w/h/d):** 216 x 58 x 192mm

**Weight:** 2.4kg



## VERDICT

### Perreaux SX25i integrated amplifier

**PROS:** Sound quality that sets a new benchmark for a \$1k amplifier

**CONS:** Features are as scarce as the sound is sublime

|                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Sound          | ★★★★½       |
| Features       | ★★          |
| Value          | ★★★★        |
| <b>OVERALL</b> | <b>★★★★</b> |

**CONTACT:** Perreaux Industries, 03-489 2975, www.perreaux.com

## VERDICT

### Perreaux SXD2 USB DAC module

**PROS:** Offers a worthwhile lift in sound quality when partnered with older CD players, cheap DVD players and USB-equipped devices (for example, PCs)

**CONS:** A little on the expensive side; no giant-killer in a high-res stereo system

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Sound          | ★★★★         |
| Features       | ★★★          |
| Value          | ★★★          |
| <b>OVERALL</b> | <b>★★★★½</b> |

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98VA toroidal transformer helps deliver a continuous 25 watts into an 8-ohm load, rising to 35 watts into a 4-ohm load. Coupled with a decent peak-to-peak voltage swing of 55.2v, the SX25i goes louder and with more dynamic snap than you might expect. Ultimate loudness is limited though, so those with large rooms and insensitive speakers need not apply.

The SXD2 is similarly bare-boned in its feature count, the rear panel accommodating a single coaxial input, lone USB input and a pair of stereo RCA outputs. This precludes the connection of multiple digital sources — such as DVD and CD — at the same time, while those wanting to use a Toslink (optical) connection will also find themselves left out in the cold. The SXD2 uses a Burr Brown PCM1738 24-bit DAC that upsamples to either 176.4kHz or 192kHz depending on the sampling frequency of the input. For improved accuracy a 44.1kHz CD source will upsample to 176.4kHz (meaning every fourth sample is a true sample) while a 48kHz input will upsample to 192kHz.

## THE SOUND OF SHADOWS

Starting closest to the source, I first connected the SXD2 via its coaxial input to my CAL Delta transport, with the SXD2 shunting the analogue signal onto a home-brewed passive preamp, Sachem monoblocks, Audio Pro FX-01 speakers and an Audio Pro ACE-BASS 2 subwoofer. Cabling was a mixture of Slin-

kylinks, Kimber and Nordost with power to the SXD2 and CAL Delta transport supplied via a Chang Lightspeed CLS HT 1000 power conditioner.

If there was one surprise with the SXD2 it was that it didn't display the astonishing low frequency resolving power and articulation for which Perreaux is famous. While bass output was tight, tuneful and free from overhang, it lacked a little of Perreaux's customary slam and extension. Coupled with a slightly lean midrange, this meant the overall sound came across as a little cool and undernourished, although it was also remarkably clean with a low noise floor, fine focus and an expansive soundstage.

Of course, a high-end audio system isn't necessarily the SX2D's natural environment. With its USB input it's just as likely to see service in a PC-based front end, effectively replacing your computer's sound card. In this situation you can be assured the SXD2 will blow just about any soundcard into the weeds.

Adding the SX25i was a real ear opener. I was stunned by the quality of sound emanating from Perreaux's pint-sized powerhouse; it didn't just sound good, it sounded great. The baby Perreaux's 25 watts are delivered with vim and verve — so much so that it makes most 100-watt-plus leviathans sound bloated and ponderous. Sure, the SX25i doesn't have the outright power and current delivery to control speakers that present a difficult load, but within its operating envelope the SX25i is a stellar performer. If you can survive with just a single line input, if you can live without a remote, if you can go cold turkey from tone and balance controls, the SX25i will reward you with a sound quality that you wouldn't have thought possible from a wee slip of an amp.

## FOLLOW YOUR TRUE HI-FI CALLING

Overall, both these products — and the SX25i in particular — offer a clear window into the source material. However, given the wide variety and variable quality of the sources that these units are likely to find employment with, this can be viewed as both a blessing and a curse. Unsurprisingly, low bit-rate MP3s piped from a PC sounded like crap. Moving up the food chain, an iPod playing music encoded at 192kbit/s in the AAC format sounded pretty decent, while CDs played through the CAL Delta transport sounded great. Don't be fooled by the Lilliputian form factor — the Perreaux duo's ability to differentiate between sources clearly marks them out as true hi-fi components rather than lowest-common-denominator midi system junk.

It's possible that the Silhouette series products will fall between stools: not macho enough for the serious hi-fi buff and too minimalist and lacking in features for the lifestyle crowd. So long as you're not bothered by the paucity of features and are hip to the dinky form-follows-function design aesthetic, it's easy to imagine any number of hi-fi scenarios based on Silhouette-series building blocks.

**Martin Bell**