

The Kaplan Cable Alchemist Power Conditioner

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by **Martin Appel**

It's always been man's quest for understanding his world and its workings that unlocked the mysteries of nature. This search resulted in technologies that are integral to our daily existence and are now taken for granted. Without this curiosity, human-kind would still be rubbing sticks together and living in caves. Paul Kaplan is such an individual. Endowed with a love of music and a strong dose of curiosity backed up with solid engineering expertise, he entered into the hi-end audio arena where his efforts were directed at the seemingly unglamorous power cord. Out of his successes with his power cords, he directed his efforts to the subject of this review, his power conditioner, the Alchemist.

When I first reviewed Paul Kaplan's power cords, the GS and later the GS Mk. 2, he indicated that he was working on a power conditioner but that it wasn't ready yet. I kept asking when and he kept answering, 'soon'. Many months went by and finally, the wait was over. Paul called me and said he was bringing the completed, Alchemist, power conditioner over to rescue me from the pervasive and deleterious effects of poor and dirty AC. Show me.

Its solid, no nonsense construction starts with a half inch thick clear anodized aluminum faceplate and four vibration shedding footers. Other than the faceplate, the rest of the casework is utilitarian. Paul eschews the use of indicator lights and glitzy displays in favor of maximizing performance and passing along the savings to you. An indicator light would have been OK by me and a front mounted on/off switch would have also been appreciated.

Naturally, the Alchemist achieves maximum performance when using his GS Mk. 2 power cord (reviewed Jan. 2011). There is a synergy at work here. I've also achieved varying degrees of performance results with other manufacturer's cords. One thing is sure, you need quality power cords to maximize the performance of your equipment.

The Alchemist comes standard with eight outlets (four duplex outlets). One pair of outlets rated for amplifier uses have 20 amp filtering maximized for this application.

Four outlets are designed and provided with 3 amp filtering for optimizing the performance of source components while providing complete isolation between digital and analogue components.

A fourth duplex outlet is provided with parallel filtering and, according to Paul, are provided for components that do not react well to power conditioners, giving the user options. Custom arrangements of outlets are available upon request for an additional fee. In my case, where I have a bi-amplified system using four monoblocks, he provided four amplifier outlets instead of the standard two.



Kaplan Cable Alchemist rear plate.

I had been using and been quite happy with the PS Audio Power Plant Premier (reviewed Jan. 2009) so it was with some trepidation that I replaced this unit with the Alchemist. I must also state that the Alchemist is not a power regenerator. When asked how it works, Kaplan doesn't offer much info other than it does. Well, we'll have to wait and see. I allowed a burn-in of about 100 hours and started the evaluation process. In evaluating the Alchemist, I used the same play list that was used with the PS Audio unit.

The first and most immediate observation was an increase in the size of the soundstage. A further expansion of space beyond the speakers took place. There seemed to be a larger dynamic envelope at work that gave the sound a more lifelike presentation with more substance. Images were larger and more three dimensional, more visceral. While the Power Plant Premier had precise imaging with clear cut edges, they seemed hyper-real as compared to the Kaplan unit. It was more hi-fi-like and images weren't quite as three dimensional or smooth. I believe the smoothness/liquidity the Alchemist exhibited was a result of less grain being present. While the PS Audio was in my system, I was never aware that some grain was present, but once the Alchemist went in I became aware of it. It was not a glaring amount, by any means, but was only noticeable when comparing the two. Now aware of it, I could always pick it out.

I also noticed that the quality of the background differed from the PS Audio. The Alchemist produced a velvet-like blackness which seemed to provide more involvement with the music The PS Audio produced a flat blackness that was more opaque and not quite as involving. Considering the Kaplan kit is twice the price, not unexpected.

Additionally, bass performance also benefitted from the change. There just seemed more of it, greater weight and solidity. Ray Brown's bass had more 'oomph' to it and he seemed more alive in my room. It was also apparent that timbral accuracy (some folks refer to this as 'tonality') [Incorrectly, I would add - Ed] was maintained throughout the audio spectrum. All the instruments were accurately portrayed but now with a little more meat on their bones.

Anyone who is a fan of the vocal performances will appreciate what the Alchemist does with the human voice. Sinatra was portrayed so vividly, with all the subtle shadings, nuance and vocal manipulation that was his forte. Frank was alive again in your living room.

Another important parameter is achieved with the Alchemist — greater gains in clarity. In Orff's Carmina Burana, there are many choral sections singing. One can hear, to a greater degree than before, that individual human beings are singing that make up these sections, not some amorphous vocal sound. Complexities of orchestral lines are also further clarified giving more meaning and greater understanding to the performance.



It was clear that Paul Kaplan had come up with something special, a power conditioner that doesn't limit current delivery, gives greater resolution, improves the soundstage and an expanded dynamic envelope that adds up to a presentation that brings you closer to the real thing, live music.

PS AUDIO has since come out with a new, top of the line model, the PerfectWave Power Plant 10 for \$4,500.00, same price as the Alchemist. I hope to get one in for a listen and report back to you.

Keep listening.

[We are proud to award the Kaplan Cable Alchemist Power Conditioner an Audiophilia Star Component Award. Congratulations! - Ed]

Reference System

Amplifiers: 4-Hephaestus HMA-1000 Monoblocks
Speakers: Levy Acoustics
Preamplifier: Marantz SC-7S2
Phono
Preamplifier: Avid PULSARE.
CD source: Marantz SA-7S1
Analogue source: Avid Volvere/SME IV arm/
Cartridge: Shelter 7000
Speaker cables: Acoustic Zen's Absolute, Wasatch's Utama
Power Cords: Kaplan GS mk 2 and Acoustic Zen Absolute
Interconnects: Acoustic Zen's Absolute, Antipodes Audio KOKIRI, KOMAKO and REFERENCE
Accessories: Herbie's Audio Lab Tenderfeet, Soundcare products, Acme Audio Labs wall outlets
Power Conditioning: Kaplan ALCHEMIST
Processor: DEQX HDP-3

Musical Choices

Reference Recordings RR-96CD Rachmaninoff: Symphonic Dances Oue/Minnesota Orchestra
Pablo OJCCD-744-2 Clark Terry/Freddie Hubbard/Dizzy Gillespie/Oscar Peterson: The Alternate Blues
Telarc CD-83373 Ray Brown: Some of My Best Friends...The Piano Players
Capitol 72434 94756 2 5 Frank Sinatra: Sinatra Sing for Only the Lonely
Telarc SACD-60042 Moussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition-Maazel/The Cleveland Orchestra
Telarc SACD-60575 ORFF: Carmina Burana-Runnicles/Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus
Nuforce LIVE BLUPOINT JAZZ SAMPLER Blueport

website
email

Price: USD\$4500.00

Source of review sample: Manufacturer loan.

Manufacturer's Comment

My apologies for the lack of specifics on the internals of the Alchemist. The individual filters specific to the outlets are 12/18db (ingress/egress) low pass filters, addressing both common and normal mode noise. While the components for surge suppression, reactive filter components as well as the breakers, wiring and connectors are specified by technical measurements and ETL approvals, the choice among possibilities is made by subjective evaluations. When the 'finalists' are chosen, further evaluations on different systems by different listeners are conducted to ensure that the products is not just optimized for my system and preferences.

Early on, it was found that if you had a component that you knew wasn't subject to the mains power demands of a power amplifier, you could provide a current limited (via a 3 amp breaker) filter(s) with better objective and subjective results for powering source components.

I also strongly believe most power amps benefit tremendously from appropriate conditioning, and that much of the talk about limiting dynamics can be attributed to poor choice of capacitive elements as much as limitations of inductive components. The Alchemist is customizable, with up to 4 individually filtered duplexes, each specific for its application, source or high current.

*Many thanks for the thoughtful, insightful review,
Paul Kaplan
Kaplan Cable*