

AUDIO  
FILESACD player and integrated amplifier. Rated at 90W/8ohm  
Made by: Marantz  
Supplied by: Marantz UK  
Telephone: 01753 680868  
www.marantz.com/kipearlhi-finews  
EDITOR'S  
CHOICE

# Marantz SA/PM-KI Pearl (£2500 ea)

**T**hirty years after joining Marantz, Ken Ishiwata has been allowed to create a pair of special limited edition components that mark his tenure. They're 'real world' in both price and concept and don't even get numerical nomenclature, the amp dubbed simply PM-KI Pearl and the SACD/CD player SA-KI Pearl.

Their hefty weights attest to the presence of large toroidal power supplies and such cabinet niceties

'Again the Pearls exhibited this silkiness which can only be described as "more-ish"'

as 5mm aluminium top plates, heavy base plates, copper-plated chassis and heavy-duty feet.

Marantz has scrimped nowhere: we were impressed to find the back of the PM-KI fitted with superb gold phono sockets and massive, genuine WBT speaker binding posts.

Minimalist in its presentation, the SA-KI Pearl carries its transport controls in vertical rows on either

side of the centre panel, while buttons and display address power on/off, sound mode for the selectable filters and DAC mode; there's also a headphone socket. The DAC button allows you to access the Toslink optical input at the back, and there are also coaxial and optical digital outputs in addition to stereo analogue out.

Marantz did not equip this for SACD multichannel playback, listing only 'Red Book' CD, SACD stereo, CD-DA, MP3 and WMA. At its heart are a quick-acting SACDM-10 mechanism with XYRON tray loader, processing

via a Crystal CS4398 DAC and proprietary HDAM SA2 circuitry.

For the PM-KI integrated, Marantz decided on a useable but not excessive 90W into 8ohm, or 140W into 4ohm. Ensuring that the PM-KI would honour any source, there's a CD-Direct input buffer circuit and a delicious constant current feedback phono equalizer with both MM/MC gain settings.

Enough inputs are provided to cope with two other line sources and two recording devices (in/out), as well as power amp direct inputs and the necessary connections for multi-room remote operation.

## SILKY SHEEN

Fed all manner of SACDs the SA-KI showed itself to be a thoroughbred player reminiscent of the far costlier Esoteric devices [p34]. The amp and the player exhibit a glorious sheen. Even when fed aggressive, raucous or cacophonous music for which the edge and rawness are integral parts, like the Pixies' indie classic *Bossanova* or the heads-down-nonsense boogie of Foghat's *Fool For the City*, the SA-KI managed to impart this diaphanous texture without either robbing the music or blanketing it.

Augmented by clear, stinging lead guitar and ringing slide, the rousing 'My Babe' tests the KI Pearls' ability to deliver punch while retaining the textural characteristics of the guitars. Again, the Pearls exhibited this silkiness which can only be described as 'more-ish'.

The phono stage was open, quiet and precise, especially with the MM setting, and the bass was consistently quick. Decay or transient stops down below were nigh on perfect, while bass-drum was reproduced with a vivid sense of hammer and skin in motion.

## VERDICT

The Pearls distil all Ken Ishiwata's musical values: subtlety, coherence, naturalness, grace. While the two are designed to work together, the SACD player stands slightly above and apart: a clarion call to music lovers to support the format. Ⓟ

**ABOVE:** Note the 'mother-of-pearl' effect badges! Switchable digital filters influence the performance of both CD and SACD playback (the DAC Mode feature) while 'Sound Mode' selects between CD and SACD layers of hybrid two-channel SACD media

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	106W / 175W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	130W / 240W / 200W / 60W
Digital jitter (CD/SACD)	330psec / 220psec
Frequency resp. (CD/amp, 20Hz-20kHz)	+0.0 to -0.25dB/+0.2 to -0.0dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/90W)	25mV/243mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (SACD/amp)	108.9dB / 90.0dB (0dBW)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, SACD/amp)	0.0012-0.0025%/0.026-0.11%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	37W/325W
Dimensions (WHD, SACD/amp)	440x419x127/440x444x127mm