

GOSSIP&NEWS

MUTINE'S SERIOUS NEW FACTORY

For the first years of its existence, Mutine Inc. was little more than a room in the home of founder Pascal Ravach.



After several iterations, it now has real headquarters, which can better be called a factory. From an importer of various (mostly) French hi-fi brands, Mutine has become an actual manufacturer.

Not that Pascal is anything like a newcomer to hi-fi. After his studies in humanities and sciences, not to mention classical piano, he built his first loudspeaker ("competitive") and an amplifier ("best forgotten"). In 1975 he became an advisor in an actual hi-fi store in Switzerland, and that led to acquaintance with several names in that domain, such as Philippe Zumbrun, then distributor of ESS and McIntosh, and a pupil of legendary sound engineer André Charlin. It was Philippe who gave Pascal the definitive demo: a two-microphone (Neumann DM89) recording using a method of his invention, later known as the "Jecklin disc" method, made on a Nagra IVs, played through a Mac amp and ESS speakers. That experience

launched Pascal on his lifelong career.

In 1981 he became an independent consultant, meeting such notables as Yves-Bernard André (who was with Vecteur, but would later found YBA) and Pierre Lurné (who would later found Audiomeca), as well as psycho-acoustician Didier Loth. The group developed such refinements as coax cables dedicated to audio, AC line filters, and spikes for speakers and other gear. Pascal claims it was he who told Linn's Ivor Tiefenbrun about the spikes, and got laughed at for his pains, though Linn would eventually add spikes to all its speakers.

(Pascal also describes riding with Tiefenbrun in a souped-up Peugot 205, and with his eternal rival Naim's Julian Vereker in his equally

souped-up Jaguar. "With either one you needed strong nerves," he says.)

In 1984 Pascal set up his own store, Présence Audio, in Lausanne. One day, Nagra's Stefan Kudelski dropped by with a prototype of a new machine that could play a revolutionary digital disc with a laser. After a comparison with a Vecteur turntable, Kudelski was so shaken he cancelled the launch (which finally occurred...in 2007).

Pascal talks about Oskar Heil, designer of the evolutionary speakers bearing his name, a modest man with a marked resemblance to Charlie Chaplin, who would tap on anything at hand to listen to its resonance, from an elevator door to his receptionist's head! Pascal then owned two pairs of his Transar 1 speakers. An invitation for Pascal to join him in his

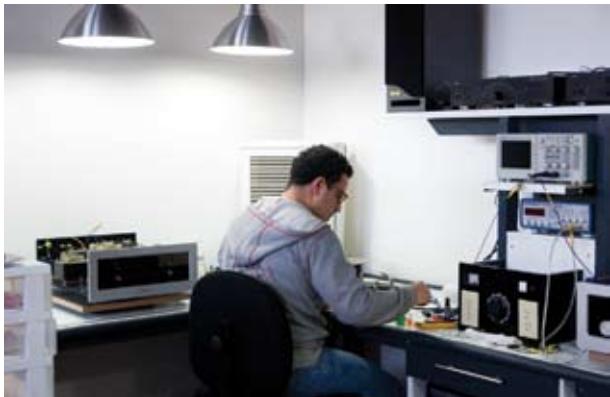
research led nowhere unfortunately. And when sound engineer André Charlin died, Pascal transcribed six of his LPs from his Vecteur table onto a Nagra T, and Philippe Zumbrun then edited the tape (to eliminate clicks and pops) for new LP release.

In 1986 Pascal was ready for leave it all behind and spend time, perhaps a year or more, on a sailboat, but events intervened. Under the name of Lys SA, he became the Swiss distributor of Jean-Marie Reynaud speakers and of Vecteur and CEC. Then came a German division, and the addition of another loudspeaker brand, Equation. Subsequently the Lys group bought Oxford Distribution, and then its manufacturing arm, Oxford Acoustics. By 1990 Lys was active across much of Europe.

It all came to a halt in 1991, when both Pascal and his British partner went through divorces. Pascal returned to his studies (sinology, musicology and linguistics). He couldn't stay away from audio, however. He discovered Audiomat, and he left for the New World, specifically Montreal, a life-long dream that had led him to use Quebec's iconic fleur de lys in his company trade name.



Mutine Inc. was set up in 1997, as was Mutine Corp., the US division. The name indicates Pascal's enduring rebel spirit. His philosophy remains that of his



previous enterprises: uncompromising purism, passion for music rather than products, and a determination to build a retail network that would operate on the same principles. That network would be marked by mutual respect and cooperation rather than maximizing of revenue, on perpetual education, and ultimately on the enrichment of the lives of the final customers.

Not surprisingly, few dealers measured up, and Mutine's retail network remains small. Despite that, the company itself continued to grow, and became more than just a distributor.

Mutine imports, notably, CEC (belt-driven CD transports, players and electronics), Mimetism (amplifiers and a CD player), Mosquito (speakers) and Actinote (audio cables). However its new larger quarters are allowing it to expand its own manufacturing. Above left, technician Mohamed Ibouchichene is completing the assembly of an Audiomat Récital tube amplifier. In the same space Equation speakers will be assembled, including the "holophonic" Equation Gaïa. A US electronics brand, Berning, will soon join them.



The team Pascal had put together is, like the distribution network, compact, composed of just five, including Pascal himself. Above right is the administrative area, with Sylvain Montreuil and Jean-François Gravel seated at their computers. And it goes without saying that if you're looking for one of Mutine's hand-picked products, the dealer may be just down the street...or a plane ride away. Be assured that is just the way Pascal Ravach wants it.