



Barry Willis

Journalist for top American audio-video publications

While his main interest is high-end audio, Barry Willis also writes about the culinary industry, visual art and theatre for a huge variety of US newspapers and magazines

Just an Illusion?

Exotic mains cables – an exercise in wishful thinking and a waste of money? **Barry Willis** on the case of the Verastarr Grand Illusion power cords, and ‘a great deal that is not understood’

Textbook engineering types say that better cables can't possibly make improvements when it comes to audio systems. If conductors are adequate to carry the current, and the impedance is right for the application, no improvement is possible, they argue, having a tremendous laugh at the expense of superstitious, navel-gazing audiophiles.

The vilification is especially vindictive when it comes to after-market power cords. A meter or two of metal braided into exotic geometry and prayed over by a hi-fi shaman won't make any difference, especially considering the thousands of miles of wire and multitude of transformers that electrical energy traverses on its way to a wall outlet. A power cord is a passive device. It can't add anything. It can only act as a filter. Furthermore, any well-designed power supply circuit has very high noise rejection. Therefore external filtration is superfluous, an exercise in wishful thinking and a waste of money.

I agree with these arguments, in theory. If adequate to the task, cables of any type shouldn't boost the performance of an audio system. Especially power cords. But I know from

long experience that they can. The benefits are often subtle, perhaps in the realm of the imagination, as some engineers so gleefully assert. This is so often the case that unless a power cord offers a clear, dramatic, unambiguous improvement, I pass over it in silence. My eyes go blurry perusing such products at trade shows and my inner ear shuts down when the spiel begins, a survival skill I mastered in arguments with my ex-wife.

KIMBER PALLADIAN

Until recently, the Kimber PK 10 Palladian was the only power cord I'd found that delivers undeniable improvement in every

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system. Its heavy moulded-on rod – not ferrite, according to company founder Ray Kimber – is extremely effective at choking

out broadband digital power supply noise, preventing it from besmirching the system as a whole. Result: a cleaner, deeper acoustic background, and therefore, better dynamics and resolution of detail.

Others don't reach the Palladian's standard. Why bother with them? Thus, the embarrassing case of the Verastarr Grand Illusion Signature power cord that for some months lay untried near my equipment rack.

The product of a small specialty audio company near Atlanta, Georgia, the G I Signature is flat and flexible, made of ‘5-nines pure silver, cryo-treated foils, Furutech FI-15 Rhodium plug and IEC, and static-free dielectric,’ according to a June 2009 press release. It's capable of improving every aspect of audio performance, according to Verastarr CEO Mike Powell, who politely inquired many times over the course of the summer if I'd tried the sample he sent. ‘Put it in your DAC,’ he finally suggested.

CORD ALMIGHTY

As instructed, I replaced the standard cord on my excellent April Music Stello DA100 Signature. The Grand Illusion's improvements were instantly apparent: better bass articulation, more pronounced separation of instruments and voices, punchier dynamics, finer detail, deeper soundstage.

Banished was the vague sense of sonic dissatisfaction that I'd felt since moving to the house a year ago.

‘Your report squares with what we're hearing from recording studios that have them,’ Powell said.

The explanation? As a physicist friend often says, ‘There's a great deal that is not understood.’

Verastarr power cords can be configured for use anywhere in the world, and come with a 10-year warranty. Find them online at www.verastarr.com.



ABOVE: The Grand Illusion and Illusion Signature power cords. Both are offered in 4ft lengths (longer options are available) and are priced \$1399 and \$3229 respectively