

The Conrad-Johnson ART 27A

\$22,000

conradjohnson.com

At first look, the new ART-27A from Conrad-Johnson resembles their past designs: a slender gold chassis, transformers at the back and a few driver tubes and power tubes to go with. A pair of KT88s per channel, which is an interesting choice, as C-J has always gone either the 6550, KT120 or these days the KT-150. President and head designer Jeff Fischel explains that the output stage is built around a very special (and costly) output transformer from Lundahl, that is optimized for a triode output stage.

But then, closer inspection reveals a chassis devoid of the usual phillips screws that usually adorn a C-J product. Everything that is customarily painted is anodized and polished, and around back are a pair of pure copper speaker binding posts—the best ones that Cardas Audio makes. The rest of the details are inside—every single component part has been chosen for optimum fidelity.

This level to detail and implementation does not come by inexpensively. The ART 27A retails for \$22,000. By comparison, the 140 watt per channel ART 150 is only \$19,000. But this amplifier has a level of resolution and sheer sonic quality that even the mighty ART 150 does not, so if you have reasonably efficient speakers and can get away with 38 watts per channel. The ART 27A is the best of the best.

We have a full review in process that will go into much greater depth on all the tech bits that make the ART 27A so unique but suffice to say the sound is incredible, and on one level does not sound like past C-J designs as even the ART150 and ART300 do. Fischel goes on to discuss the “compromises that usually have to be made in higher-powered amplifiers, that do not need to be made here.”

The most significant part of the ART 27As design is its output stage powered by an independent, fully regulated power supply for each channel. Many tube amplifiers have regulated power supplies for the driver and inverter stages, but the ART 27A has a fully regulated high voltage power supply for each output channel—a big part of its incredibly lifelike sound.





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As with all ART amplifiers, there will only be 250 of these produced. Every ART product we have used has been unique and a cut above the usual excellent job they do at C-J, but the ART 27A goes beyond. Well beyond.

This amplifier delivers 36 of the most glorious, pure Class-A watts per channel we've had the opportunity to experience. It is SET-like in delicacy, yet delivers up a lot more power, and thanks to the circuit design and implementation, incredibly articulate bass as well. Not what one expects typically from even the most exceptional vacuum tube designs. Bass always seems to be the final frontier, yet the ART 27A does an outrageously good job at providing extension and dimension to the lowest registers.

In the end, this is a paradox that only you can pass judgment on. Many will stop at the price and freak out. However, if you've got a high-quality pair of main speakers and are looking more for sonic quality than just a lot of power, the ART 27A is a real jewel in the right hands. 🎵

The Good:

Incredibly rich, detailed, grain-free sound

Painstaking attention to electronic and mechanical details

Limited edition, so you won't see em everywhere

Not so much:

Still only gold as a front panel choice

Top end of the price scale for 36 watts per channel

The Verdict:

The C-J ART27A is one of the world's finest 36 watt per channel amplifiers, but one of the most expensive as well. Though it has a limited audience, it will be a grail-level product for those that make the choice.