

AS SEEN IN...

CustomRetailer

September 2008

CASESTUDY: Ultra Fidelis

By CR Staff

Getting 'Furmanized'

Custom installer builds a unique showroom, boosts sound quality.

Milwaukee-based Ultra Fidelis has been providing state-of-the-art A/V products and custom installations since its inception in 1997. If you had to use one word to sum up the company's approach to audio and video, it would be "selective." This includes the product lines they sell and the showroom where they demonstrate them. So when the company needed to move to a new location, the objective was to find a standalone building where they could recreate the compelling music and movie experiences most of us enjoy frequently at home, but rarely, if ever, in a commercial establishment. And when it came to power management for the new showroom, only solutions that truly enhanced sound quality needed to apply.

Finding the Right Place

Until 2003, Ultra Fidelis operated out of founder Jonathan Spelt's house. When the company outgrew this space, the search was on for a new location, a task that fell to Scott Wilson, who had just become Jonathan's new business partner. "In his search, Scott happened



Ultra Fidelis' Jonathan Spelt and Scott Wilson

to stop in front of a Victorian duplex in the heart of Milwaukee's Westown neighborhood that was for sale," says Spelt. "The house had previously been a daycare center, and having been aban-

doned, was pretty run-down. But Scott had a vision of buying the house and transforming it into a one-of-a-kind showroom environment."

Wilson performed all the demolition himself, and hired electricians and painters who had worked on his own house to help with the project. He and his wife, Anna, also tackled the interior decoration, and being on a shoestring budget, were happy to accept donated furniture from Wilson's old company. Work on the house continued until November 18, 2003, culminating in



Furman's Elite-15 PF i includes Power Factor technology

CASESTUDY: Ultra Fidelis

a showroom that is truly symbolic of Ultra Fidelis.

The house consists of two demo rooms on each of two floors that provide intimate settings to audition everything from simple two-channel music systems to highly sophisticated, complete multimedia home theaters. Leather couches, track lighting and original artwork contribute to an experience that is as close to being in your own home as possible.

“Our customers’ response to the house is always very positive, as demonstrated by an increase in sales since we moved in,” says Spelt. “It is a space absolutely dedicated to A/V with no distractions. Customers feel comfortable in the atmosphere of the showroom, which is why we may add personnel at some point, but won’t be adding square footage. We typically provide service to individual families or singles, and prefer the cozy, personal setting we now have.”

Furman Wins Over Ultra Fidelis

As selective as Ultra Fidelis was toward the location and arrangement of their

showroom, they are even more so when it comes to the products they work with. They service a high-end clientele, with the average system running for about \$50,000. For such a significant investment, only the best will do, so the company takes component selection very seriously. It is a process they enter carefully, looking to find only the best product lines that they will stick with long term. “Our process involves a pretty intensive courtship with new product lines. We are very slow and deliberate, and ultimately our selection has a lot to do with our emotional response to products when implemented in an A/V system. As a result, we don’t usually go with product lines that offer discounts on freight or other incentives, but tend to choose independent specialists that are dedicated to sound and video quality.”

Of all the components Ultra Fidelis offers, including products by Crestron, Audio Research, Integra, Vienna Acoustics, Vandersteen Audio, SpeakerCraft, Pioneer Elite, InFocus, REL and Halo by Parasound, perhaps the most scrutinized is power man-



This fully restored Victorian is the new location for Ultra Fidelis.

agement, which has endured a rocky relationship with the company. Until recently, Spelt had always been against power conditioners. He has been selling audio for 30 years, and while he knows that power protection is needed to protect equipment from surges, in his experience, most conditioners have a negative affect on sound quality. He has



The second floor demonstrates the possibilities of a warm, inviting entertainment center.



The first floor demo room is sleek and modern.

found that equipment actually sounds best when simply plugged into the wall. At Ultra Fidelis, power management solutions are judged by how an A/V system sounds after the products are implemented. Their measure is whether or not the product enhances the sound quality, an audition that all power conditioners had failed in the past.

“We at Ultra Fidelis have a long history of being unimpressed with the ramifications of power line conditioners in our audio systems—always a seeming trade-off of a few performance improvements to some (or a lot of) detriment. It took endorsements from a couple of the people in our industry whose opinions we regard highly to change our minds.”

One of those endorsements came from audio guru Bill Low of AudioQuest. Low came to the showroom to do a presentation, and Spelt asked him if he had any power management solutions to recommend. This is a conversation the two have had many times, and the answer has always been no. This time, however, Low recommended Furman power management products. Following his advice, and another recommendation by one of their valued supply vendors, Spelt sampled some

units, and was won over. Since that time, Ultra Fidelis has implemented Furman solutions in its showroom to enhance audio and video quality, and is utilizing Furman products in installations to reduce service calls.

“I spent a night listening to my home system fully Furmanized and I have to say, in complete sincerity, I cannot remember the last performance upgrade I made in my system that moved the sound quality up—opened the door so much—as these ‘optional’ components.

“Every single aspect of the sound through this system is dramatically superior to the same system without the Furman line conditioners. No matter how you like to dissect the sound to describe it, those things all got better. Bass extension and control, tonal balance and color palette, human-sounding voices, all aspects of realistic 3-D imaging, dynamics—the whole envelope is pushed much farther out. I even had my power amp plugged into Furman’s Power Factor conditioner. This was always the last hurdle that no power conditioner we had auditioned could come close to jumping, but the Furman did it great.”

Ultra Fidelis offers Furman’s entire

home theater line, and they try to get every customer to at least an Elite 15 PF i level, which includes Furman’s SMP technology for virtually maintenance-free AC surge protection, Linear Filtering Technology (LiFT) to assure audio/video clarity, and Extreme Voltage Shutdown (EVS) to protect equipment from dangerous overvoltage situations. At the center of the Elite-15 PF i is Furman’s unique Power Factor Technology, which provides a massive reactance circuit to allow high-current components (such as power amplifiers) to operate at peak efficiency without modulation or distortion caused by impedance and resistance on the AC line.

While Ultra Fidelis does include power management in installation proposals, and some customers will accept it based on that, they have a much more hands-on customer base that will borrow the products to try them out and make their decision based on that. The results speak for themselves. “We’ve always had a very low rate of service calls, which is a testament to the components we select. But since taking on Furman, that number has been reduced to zero, which speaks volumes to their solutions.” **CR**

SUPERCHARGE

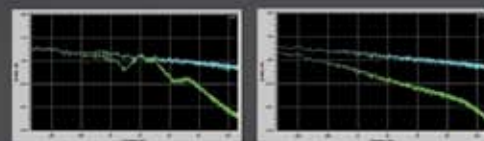
your HOME THEATER



High Octane AC Power For Your Home Theater System

Power amplifiers and powered subwoofers need power - and lots of it - to perform at maximum efficiency. All too often, your AC wall tap can't supply enough current fast enough to meet these demands, leaving your system sounding dull, flat, and lifeless.

That's where Furman's Elite-15 PF i Power Conditioner steps in. Furman's exclusive Power Factor Technology provides a current reservoir of over 45 amps peak, so when your amplifier needs a big draw, it can "steal" it from the massive reactance circuit in the Elite-15 PF i to eliminate the AC bottleneck. And with Furman's Linear Filtering Technology and Series Multi-Stage Protection, your system will get clean, safe power for maximum performance with professional-grade protection.



Typical power conditioners (left) reduce some noise. Only Furman's Linear Filtering and transient Power Factor Technologies combine to provide consistent AC noise reduction for unparalleled performance.

For more information, please visit www.furmansound.com/elite

"Bass instantly tightened, the noise floor dropped, and a veil seemed to be lifted from my loudspeakers after removing the power plugs from my wall and inserting the Elite-15 PF i...."

- Danny Richelieu, *Widescreen Review*, December 2007



FURMAN

For more information on Furman products, please contact Furman at 707-763-1010, or email Kyle Rice, West Coast Regional Sales (kylar@furmansound.com), Paul Lemay, Central U.S. Regional Sales (paull@furmansound.com) or Jimmy Paschke, East Coast Regional Sales (jimmyp@furmansound.com).