

## Home Audio Equipment Review



October 2004

### Review Follow-Up

## Siltech Compass Lake Interconnects and The Emperor Speaker Cables

by Marc Mickelson

*"They're about musical expression and faithfulness to the recording, both in equal parts."*



A few months ago [I reviewed Siltech's Signature Generation 6 Forbes Lake interconnects and Eskay Creek speaker cables](#). I called them "a true sonic reference point" and praised the wholeness of their sonic performance, calling them "complexly satisfying and *complete*." If it weren't for their very high price -- the review interconnects and speaker cables sent to me cost over \$40,000 -- I would use Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek as my reference. Oh, to find a shoebox stuffed with \$100 bills!



However, these Siltech cables created a problem in terms of our [Reviewers' Choice](#) listing, which collects two kinds of products: those that are state of the art, and those that perform far beyond what their prices might indicate. On the one hand, Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek were the best audio cables I had used; on the other hand, Siltech makes two interconnects and two speaker cables that are supposedly even better. There was also the issue of cost to consider. Johnnie Cochran and Judge Judy combined couldn't argue successfully that \$40,000 in interconnects and speaker cables represent tremendous value.

With all of this in mind, it was easy to accept the offer of Siltech's Compass Lake interconnects and The Emperor speaker cables for a follow-up review. These are Siltech's top cables, costing a gulp-inducing \$9000 per meter pair of interconnects and \$26,750 per eight-foot pair of speaker cables. What accounts for most of the great cost is the silver and gold used for the cables' conductors, which are larger than those of Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek. Siltech adds 24K gold to high-purity silver in order to "fill" the gaps between

crystals and thereby improve, in Siltech's words, "micro-conductivity." I can't say that their conductors are double the gauge, but Compass Lake and The Emperor are certainly larger and heavier cables than Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek. These are high-end-audio products, after all. Proportionality is *not* a governing principle.

For all of its Signature cables, Siltech employs X-Balanced Micro Technology, which involves winding the conductors so tightly that they meet each other at nearly 90 degrees, along with proprietary locking SST RCA plugs and SP 003 spade connectors, both of which are said to enhance conductivity through the use of silver and gold. I cover in much greater detail the design and construction of Siltech's Signature Generation 6 cables in my Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek review, and what is discussed there is applicable here.

As I began reconnecting my system with Compass Lake interconnects and The Emperor speaker cables, I couldn't help but wonder what a pickle I would be in if these cables sounded just as good as but no better than the less-expensive Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek, which I had just removed. Luckily, this wasn't the case -- Compass Lake and The Emperor were considerably better. What I found most endearing about them was that they sounded very detailed and fast while they conveyed all of the color the music had to offer. I don't mean "color" as in coloration, swaying from accurate, but rather "color" as in character, conveying the semblance of live music. So often in reproduction, color is a casualty of what is thought to be accuracy, or vice versa. The sound of many tube amps, for instance, has color, but it may not convey the sheer resolution and speed of solid-state designs, which in turn can sound lean and bleached -- colorless. As I've written many times, the best equipment gives you at least a smidgen of both, and the *very* best makes you wonder on which side of the fence it sits, so unqualified is its musical portrayal.

This is where the performance of Siltech Signature Generation 6 interconnects and speaker cables resides, that of Compass Lake and The Emperor to an even greater extent than Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek. As I pointed out in my earlier review, the former pairing has a slight "residual warmth" that nudges it away from absolute fidelity. Not so with Compass Lake and The Emperor, whose sound is lively, lithe, highly resolving, fast and tangible. Just when you think that these cables display more fullness and body than nimbleness and detail, a transient will come along and convince you otherwise. It's a reviewer's job to suss out such differences, but these top-of-the-line Siltech cables make analysis and categorization futile. They're about musical expression *and* faithfulness to the recording, both in equal parts.

A recent visit to Audio Research netted an important musical recommendation: David Grisman and Tony Rice's *Tone Poems* [Acoustic Disc ACD 10], which I promptly found at Best Buy of all places. *Tone Poems* pairs Rice and Grisman on various vintage guitars and mandolins in the right and left channels respectively, each instrument named and profiled in the CD's extensive liner notes. Warren Gehl, resident golden ears at ARC, uses *Tone Poems* during his listening tests because it "sounds real." I agree. With two pairs of Compass Lake interconnects and a pair of spade-terminated The Emperor speaker cables in my system, *Tone Poems* was a sonic revelation. I listened to Grisman's quick picking at the start of "Mill Valley Waltz" over and over. It sounded neither veiled nor overly crisp; the leading edge of each note was neither dull nor accentuated. Instead, Grisman's picking was swiftly paced, fully resolved and delicate -- *perfect*.

Compass Lake and The Emperor favor no genre of music -- I listened to more classical and rock than usual with both cables in my system, and couldn't fault the reproduction of either. However, I did discover that speakers and electronics with equally complete performance as that of the Siltech cables were mandatory, which in my case meant Lamm or Atma-Sphere electronics driving Wilson Audio MAXX 2 speakers. It's wrong-headed to attempt to tune the sound of your system with Compass Lake and The Emperor. They're instruments of musical precision, not a means of recalibrating the balance of an audio system. Their performance is the *epitome* of balance.

Not for the faint of checkbook, Siltech Compass Lake and The Emperor are even better than their less-expensive (but still very pricey) Signature Generation 6 brethren, which *were* the very best audio cables I've heard. Whoever can afford these interconnects and speaker cables (and the audio system in which to use them) is a lucky person indeed. Hey Siltech, how about a leasing program?

...*Marc Mickelson*

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### **Siltech Signature Generation 6 Compass Lake Interconnects and The Emperor Speaker Cables**

**Prices:** Compass Lake interconnects, \$9000 USD per meter pair; The Emperor speaker cables, \$26,750 per 2.5-meter pair.

**Warranty:** Lifetime.

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