

# Harmonic Technology and Kimber Kable Power Cords by Karl Lozier

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World Premiere!  
**Two New Power Cords:  
Harmonic Technology And  
Kimber Kable**  
One Outstanding Bargain And One Simply Outstanding  
Review By Karl Lozier

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## Kimber Kable PK10 Palladian

A casual overview would reveal some similarities and some disparities between the Harmonic Technology and Kimber Kable companies. It seems obvious that both companies are making sincere efforts to give audiophiles and music lovers cables that are as good as they can make them. Harmonic Technology is a relative newcomer to high-end audio cable production. They have achieved a great deal of respect in their relatively short time of existence, resulting in a number of "glowing" reviews, including mine. Their top-line products feature their unique "single crystal" wire technology. The uniqueness is at the microscopic level of visibility and is a very real basic difference compared to other wires. Combined with evident respect for time proven cable technology, they have been able to compete with the best in the specialty cable field and usually at a substantially lower price. I don't pretend to know how they can do that.

Kimber Kable Company has become one of the older companies in the audio specialty cable business. They are generally acknowledged as one of the most respected companies in the high-end audio business, not just the cable specialty. They are admired for their outstanding research facilities; it is the envy of most audio companies. When they bring out a new product line it typically has been thoroughly researched and then developed. The new flagship products have to be relatively expensive to cover their costs of truly new or innovative designs. Usually this is later followed by less expensive variations of the initial innovative products. This has certainly been true of their innovative and justly famous "Select" models of interconnects and speaker cables.

The review topic is A.C. power cords; mainly the new models from Harmonic Technology and Kimber Kable. I feel fortunate to have received some of the earliest production samples from both companies. I have enjoyed discussing these new models with Jim Wang of Harmonic and Dick Diamond of Kimber. Many readers, audiophiles, music lovers and engineers do not believe that A.C. power cords can affect audio sound quality in any manner, positively or negatively. Until about three years ago, I was in agreement with that statement. At that time I received samples of all the Dominus series of cables made by Jim Aud's Purist Audio Company. I dutifully hooked up everything he had sent to me.

After listening and reviewing those fine (very expensive - forty-seven thousand dollars total!) and very musical products, I replaced them with my usual cables and factory supplied power cords. I later realized that I had overlooked one A.C. cord. I changed it and only it, in the middle of a review listening session. The sound changed. I could not quite believe it; I didn't want to believe it. I repeated and repeated the change. Same audible result each and every time! Late at night I called in the backup reviewer, my wife Pat. I simply said, "I'm going to play two selections and then repeat them - see if you notice any difference." No hints or anything else was said or even suggested. When finished, I asked her if she had heard any difference or change. She replied, "yes, of course". Similar sessions were repeated and always with the same result. I was convinced, so was she and anyone else who was ever exposed to that change. The fine Purist Audio power cords have remained in my system. Pretenders to their ultimate spot in my A.C. power cord hierarchy have typically lost out by revealing added brightness, harshness, grittiness or all three.

## Harmonic Technology Fantasy 10

Harmonic Technology's Jim Wang contacted me and asked if I was interested in hearing a few of their top products. He sounded particularly proud of their about to be released A.C. power cord. He explained that they wanted a power cord that was audibly superior to their model Pro AC-11. They could go in one of two directions. They took their AC-11 and made every effort to improve each and every aspect of construction. They used their best single crystal wires, as



used in interconnects or speaker cables, and even one end of the IEC-plugs is now made out of the same unique metal (U.S.A. models only). Next possible improvement was to use heavier gauge, 10 instead of 11, wiring and to significantly increase the amount of insulation and shielding beyond the point of diminishing return. The result of this overall effort to improve or trying to improve every physical detail of their previous A.C. power cord has evidently paid off, though I did not have the model Pro AC-11 available for comparison. Getting down to the nitty-gritty conclusion was actually fairly easy.

The Harmonic Technology's Fantasy 10 A.C. power cord had none of the audible brightness so typical of stock power cords and most of the other power cords I've auditioned. In the past year or two, I have received a great many interconnects for review or possible review. I've also received a fair number of loudspeaker cables and thankfully, relatively few power cords. Thankfully, because they at times are almost boring, because they require a great deal of time and are difficult to review thoroughly and understandably for our readers. In my situation, factor in one A.C. outlet that I have great difficulty reaching while not being able to view it directly. Imagine having to change cords dozens of times during the review process. When getting A.C. cords for review, I always request three of them. I usually wind up replacing the two power cords for my amplifiers and the cord for the PS-Audio Power Plant all at the same time with the power cords being evaluated. The Power Plant in turn feeds the front-end components - pre-amplifier, phono stage, turntable and DVD/CD player. Much later in this article you'll read why I've slightly changed my typical procedure because of what works best with at least one new A.C. cord. The review process for the Fantasy A.C. power cord lasted for about two weeks.

The conclusion was rather simple and straightforward. Please remember for the remainder of this review the caveat - I've not heard a large percentage of currently available cables in my own home. The last time I checked, there were more than a hundred cable products available just from companies whose names begin with the letter "A"! Neither have I listened to them on a variety of systems. I do not intend to. The Fantasy 10 A.C. power cord, at \$399 is a true bargain. I've heard nothing for less than \$750 that is its equal - period. In fact, at the time of the review listening sessions, there were no power cords I had used that were significantly

better, at any price. You will have to define the word "significantly" for yourself. To me significantly typically means I feel that I can identify which of two products is currently playing or being used in my system without direct comparison. That I could not do when comparing the Fantasy 10 with other conventional A.C. power cords, even those selling for more than \$1,000!

A company summary turns out to be very flattering for Harmonic Technology. They are one of a relatively few companies that has sent review sample of all that is needed for a "system of wires". In other words, I've had their fine interconnects, Pro-Silway MK 11's, speaker cables and now their new Fantasy 10 power cord for use, all at one time. All these products, separately or together, can be compared directly against the best I've ever used, all of which are substantially more expensive. These Harmonic Technology products are outstanding bargains at their relatively modest prices. It's time for music lovers to be aware of that fact. Differences between them and the very best and much more expensive competitors are usually subtle and take repeated direct A-B comparisons to be reliably heard. Quite a feat for a company that been around for less than five years.

Ray Kimber had decided to go in the "other direction" with Kimber Kable's new A.C. power cord. Quite briefly it features an entirely new design for power cords. It attempts to correct basic electrical transmission problems that are generally thought to have no effect whatsoever on sound quality. Two years ago at CES, Dick Diamond responded to a question by me by saying that A.C. power cords were their next major product project. Further more, if successful it would be based on an entirely new and novel approach. Eventually Ray wound up leading a team of engineers and listeners in the new development program. Kimber's vaunted research facilities were put to use again.

The resulting physical appearance of their newly designed Palladian A.C. power cord gives a hint of what's happening with their unique design. The main part of the cord is a typical high-end audio size, a bit over a half inch in diameter. It is a neutral green compared to most competitors' black color. Almost two feet from the male IEC plug is a foot long evenly distributed bulge that is about two inches in diameter and black colored. It is noticeable; it is metallic and heavy. It definitely will not bend, not even a little bit! Keep that fact in mind when figuring what length might be needed in some installation areas where the cord needs to take a bend between two and three feet from the male plug. The location of this metallic protuberance is actually not at all critical according to Dick. They simply had to decide on a standard positioning for production purposes. With most A.C. home outlets, the black foot long bulge usually winds up solidly on the floor within a few inches of the outlet. If in doubt, try or order the Palladian cord one or two feet longer than usual. Don't bother thinking about the additional cost. It is almost a giveaway at ten dollars for each additional foot.

The expense of these A.C. power cords is tied up in thousands of hours of research, development and unfortunately in production of that "bulge" area. Certain unique areas are still very time consuming for the finished bulge portion of the Palladian 10 power cord. It is almost assuredly limiting initial availability at Kimber dealers. I'll give you a hint of where this, the first review of this uniquely designed power cord, is going. There is going to be a huge demand for a product that can do what it does and at a relatively moderate price for a breakthrough high-end audio product. They are not the most expensive power cords in my home at this time. They are the best sounding however.

I had kind of kept up with the preceding development of these power cords. I was extremely curious as to what could be the basis for a new approach to A.C. power cord design. I was not entirely surprised when Dick called to ask if I wanted to use the new design in its final form. I was most anxious to hear them but extremely disappointed when he said that because they were so rare, they could only spare one. I told Dick that one was much better than none, but whenever I've ever done serious listening evaluations, I've always used three power cords simultaneously (same number for interconnect evaluations). I felt privileged when a box containing three of the Palladians arrived at my doorstep. Unfortunately some unexpected glitches caused a delay of a couple of weeks before I was able to start listening sessions. The first few sessions were done replacing only the best power cord I had found for the P.S. Audio Power Plant. It in turn feeds my turntable (VPI) phonostage and pre-amplifier (latest Herron Audio updates). It surprisingly made some noticeable improvement used there in that position. Time and a fair amount of experimentation seemed to prove that the greatest improvement occurred with any component when its A.C. power cord was replaced with Kimber's new one. Having only any preceding device, power conditioner or A.C. power distribution unit replaced with the Palladian, prevented maximum audible improvement. In other words, place the Palladians after any other devices and plug them directly into the IEC input of the device being evaluated.

I have no idea if A.C. power cords need any burn in or break in time, but as is my norm, I plugged the Palladians into my A.C. outlets for twenty-four hours before attempting any review evaluations. I have eight power cords in my main system as an example. Where to start if you're not going to replace all the A.C. cords at one time? I suggest beginning with the components doing the most amplification; then start experimenting. Perhaps surprisingly, some improvements may be heard at each and every connection and in like kind, for an additive and positive effect.

### **Harmonic Technology Fantasy 10**

With previous A.C. power cord evaluations, the most prominent negative effect on sound quality was almost always added brightness, which often transformed into added harshness or grittiness. The Harmonic Technology Fantasy 10 and Purist Audio Dominus power cords seemed to add nothing. The Wireworld Silver Electra III added only a very small amount. Till proven otherwise I believe this added brightness, by any power cord, is indicative of the cord picking up RFI (radio frequency interference) or EMI (electromagnetic interference). This

interference pickup adds to and affects the components attached to the power cord in various negative ways, audible brightness or smearing the most common. The Palladian PK 10 added no brightness. Was this lack of any hint of added brightness due to superior interference shielding or a result of its unique design?



What Kimber is doing within their bulging area is something that I've heard mentioned since my earliest days in audio. Many have claimed to have cured or at least helped the condition/potential problem. The condition is known as standing wave reflections. These reflections result in various problems including distortions of various kinds and added noise. Till now, it seems as if no one has worried about that problem with A.C. power cords. Ray Kimber and his project staff have worked on eliminating or greatly reducing these standing wave reflections. Listening certainly seems to validate those claims. Tonal balance is relatively unchanged though there may be a subliminal further lowering of added brightness compared to the previously found best, or least bright, power cords. The dark or black backgrounds, against which musical notes stand out in relief, have seemingly now gone beyond black. Some people refer to this effect as varying degrees of intertransient silence. This has sunken to an even lower level than ever before, which would mean less interference and modulation of the music. That easily translates as noticeably cleaner, clearer sound with low level details becoming more readily apparent without any hint of exaggeration or so called hyper detailing.

My listening notes contain a number of words and phrases to describe the overall effect or panorama that I was experiencing and much of it seemed new in kind or degree to me. Night and day differences? Of course not; those who know me or my writings well, know I do not like to succumb to hyperbole. Remember, I'm used to using what may have been the very best of what we need to now call conventionally designed A.C. power cords. The Palladian's are not conventional. They are a new and uniquely significant step beyond conventional. For those that have made no or little attempt to keep up with power cords and interconnects developed and improved by the better cable specialty companies the past few years, they may be shocked by the improvements wrought by the addition of this most recent development. There is much more; the soundscape becomes noticeably solid and palpable. At times, the bass response on recent CD's by Reference Recordings, Telarc, Classic and others actually changes character. The bass becomes noticeably more solid and feelable while reducing any feeling of added bass fullness, excessive bloom or hangover in the upper bass. This effect can be likened to replacing an older low powered amplifier with one of the new high-powered ones featuring a huge power supply. The degree of bass slam, tightness, control and detail can be downright startling. Ditto for Kimber's new A.C. power cord. This change in upper bass range fullness could conceivably be a negative if a listener's system is "on the lean side" of neutral.

Though tonal balance does not really change significantly with the Palladians, most everything else does to at least some extent. As might be expected, the more complex the musical composition and the louder the listening level, the more apparent the improvements wrought by these power cords become. Lovers of large-scale classical and choral music should become quickly addicted. In the top end, forte and climactic passages definitely change. There is a definite sense of less congestion or smearing resulting in greater detail with more instruments cleanly delineated. All the while there is a pervading overall sense of clarity as if background noise has dropped even further below the threshold of inaudibility. This is particularly surprising as in my typical setup, the Herron amplification chain is audibly and measurably one of the quietest available.

The use of the P.S. Audio's model #300 lowers the level further as does my use of eight "Quiet Line" filters decorating a like number of my A.C. wall outlets. In the all-important mid-range there is a very definite audible sense of greater coherence and solidarity. So much so that once in awhile it seems as if the soundscape or so called soundstage width has subtly narrowed. This could be the flip side of the old

audio explanations of some components, including phono pickup cartridges, creating a bigger and wider soundscape? The traditional answer has been, "yeah, creating a lot of out-of-phase information/signals." A summary of the audible changes in the midrange would have to include a couple of over used and under defined phrases. Examples would include "it just sounds more nearly right", "everything is so coherent, solid and clear" and "it usually sounds more real." The "usually" in the last phrase is because the feeling of overall soundstage size and overall ambiance is sometimes seemingly reduced using the Palladians.

Miscellaneous thoughts include - where is this new technology going - interconnects, speaker cables or --? Can the technology's physical properties eventually be physically spread out thinly and flexibly over the entire length of the cable? What effect might these power cords have on other problems such as noisy power transformers, poorly performing switching devices and so on and when will any of us take the time to see what effect there is on video equipment - our poor home theater cousins? There is some logical basis for deciding to have all your cables from the same company (one with a consistent philosophy and goals) rather than mixing and matching. However, I personally believe you can simply and safely choose your A.C. power cords on the basis of quality and how much you choose to pay for that sound quality.

The conclusion is straightforward, simple and with the usual reviewing caveats. Kimber's top model, Palladian PK 10 A.C. power cord, is the best I have ever used or heard. Could there be any chance that an A.C. power cord could be the product of the year? Its potential implications for use in/with other products appears unlimited.

A company summary shows the Kimber Kable Company continuing to reap the benefits of their continuing research, development and refinement of truly innovative products. Using my usual equipment with Kimber's Select #1030 interconnects and Kimber's Select #3035 speaker cables and powered by Kimber's Palladian PK 10 power cords, my system sounds significantly better than ever.

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