

2012 THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

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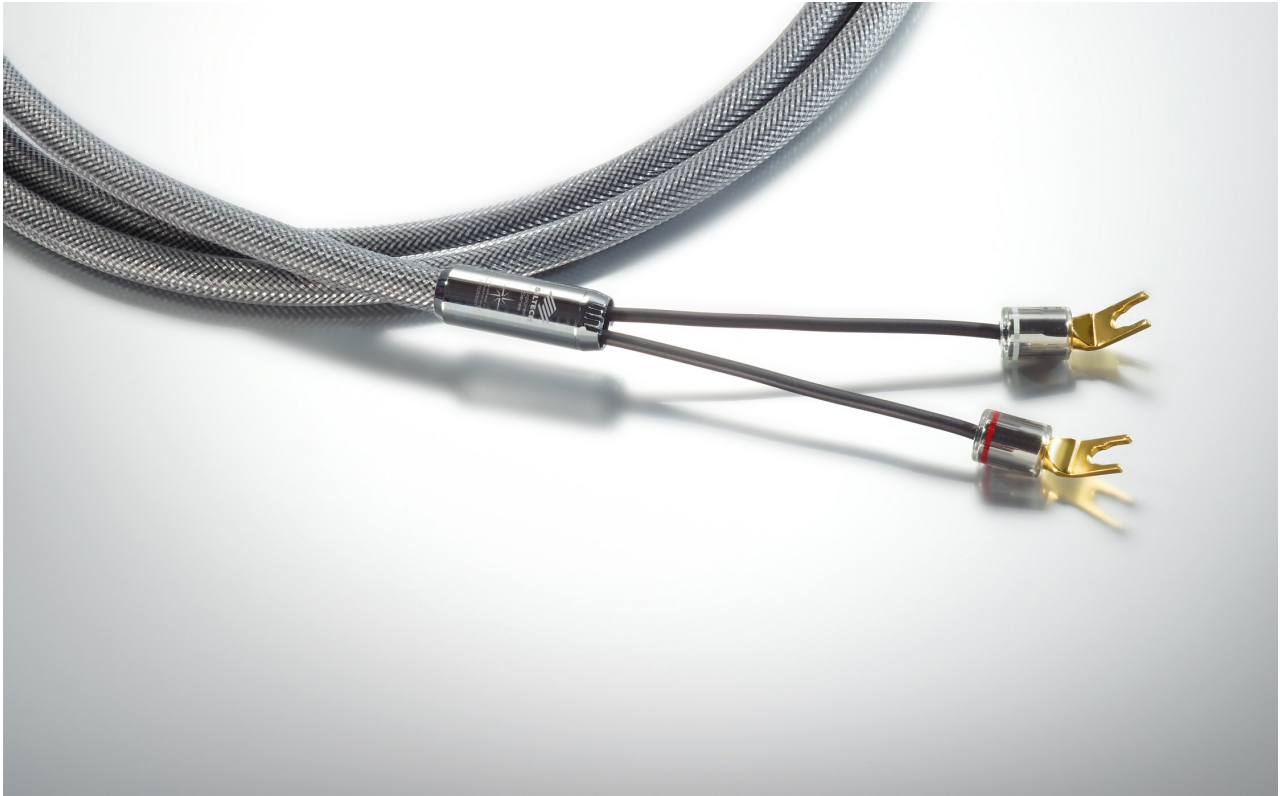
Siltech Explorer

Neil Gader, The Absolute Sound 2012

No Compass Required

A thousand bucks. That's where the action is in cables. This is the level where cable designers are able to open their bag of tricks just a little wider. They have more freedom with conductor selection and geometry, dielectric and jacketing materials, and terminations. In other words, this is where it really starts getting fun. From my earliest days in the high end I've associated Siltech with precious metals and a Ritz Carlton air of exclusivity. In fact, I still refer to one of the company's multi-strand puresilver interconnects from years ago. Siltech remains committed to the benefits of silver and combinations of silver and gold due to the stability of these metals over the long run. For the affordable Explorer Series, Siltech needed to hit price points that rendered precious metals conductors a non-starter. Copper, however, in the form of the Ohno single-crystal type, proved an attractive alternative, as it has for various cable makers. These "six-nines" (6N, or 99.9999% pure) conductors are well known in wire circles. Their characteristics include good flexibility, high corrosive-resistance, low electric resistance, and non-crystal boundaries. Explorer mirrors Siltech's Classic Anniversary cables with jacketing that is composed of a dual layer of Kapton film with Teflon insulation to protect the copper conductors from mechanical vibrations, electromagnetic interference, and RF. Tonally the Siltech Explorer is a straight-shooter, strengthened by an expressive and firmly weighted midrange. There are no discernable suckouts or weird tonal blips to reckon with. Its top end veers slightly to the drier side of the spectrum, and during the bluegrass-fusion romp "1A" from Appalachian Journey [Sony] I found the cry of the fiddle just a little tighter and a bit more sinewy. It could be a trifle sweeter in the lower treble, but I can't say any wires at this level of aggressive pricing have bettered the Explorer in this respect. Midband dynamics are nothing short of arresting, and bass extension is very good—tight and commanding with a range of expression that communicates many of the more specific textures in the lower octaves,

such as the skin sound from drum heads and the woody resonances from bassoon and cello.



Listening through the TAD Evolution 1, I ultimately felt that the gravelly rumble of a bass violin didn't quite send a shudder down into my wood floors the way a reference cable like the Wireworld Platinum did, but in comparison to the similarly priced Clarus Aqua, a recent Golden ear

recipient, it wasn't too far off the mark. Explorer's healthy midrange bias is sensitive to small shifts in vocal timbre. As I listened to Shelby Lynne's "How Can I Be Sure" from The Look of Love, I noted a slightly darker personality that the Explorer retrieved from this recording that added to the mood of melancholy to Lynne's plaintive vocal. This recording also revealed how the Explorer seemed to subtly amplify the deeply reverberant nature of these Dusty Springfield covers. Additionally, "Wish I Could," Norah Jones' spare opening track from Not Too Late [Blue Note], revealed the cable's strong low-level resolution. Inner detail was unexpectedly exacting. Specifically, Jones adds a very soft harmony track beneath her lead vocal midway through this tune. The vocal articulation of this interplay can easily get buried in the mix, but the Explorer very nearly matched the other cables in this survey.

The Siltech Explorer, by a wide margin the lowest-priced cable of this survey, makes no major missteps, but I've got a couple of quibbles. In fairness, these issues will be small potatoes in systems lacking the transparency of the TAD and MBL gear. However, on orchestral music the Explorer doesn't quite lay down the full three-dimensional spread of music across the full soundstage. During Rutter's Requiem it reduces the scale of the Meyerson Center, as if tugging in the venue's boundaries a bit. Compared to many premium cables (check out Siltech's Royal Signature, if you dare) the performance just misses that keen sense that the music's acoustic energy is bumping up against the walls. Finally micro-dynamics and low-level transient information are not quite as vivid as

they are in the top-tier wires. For example, during “Slumber My Darling” with singer Alison Krauss performing with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, bassist Edgar Meyer, and fiddler Mark O’Connor, the best cables let me hear the rosin-laden bite as the bow touches down on the string and the bloom of the instrument’s long, resonant sustain. Ideally I should be able to follow each string instrument as it harmonizes with the singer’s melodic line. Explorer comes close, but these fine details were slightly muddled in comparison to my reference. In sum, the Siltech Explorer is an excellent upgrade for midpriced systems of above-average transparency. Along with a few other noteworthies it continues on the road to redefining cable performance at this price point. In a sector where it’s easy to lose one’s bearings, Explorer has an unerring sense of direction.