The highest possible accolade from Japan...

In January 2011, Harbeth’s designer, Alan Shaw travelled to Tokyo as a guest of honour. “It was an immense privilege to represent Harbeth alongside senior representatives of the Japanese audio industry.” said Alan. The 19,000km round-trip enabled Harbeth’s designer to personally accept a coveted Grand Prix 2010 award presented by the highly respected Stereo Sound magazine, now in its forty-fifth year.

Three Harbeth speakers appear in this year’s best-of round up. But it’s the astonishing all-round performance and value-for-money of Harbeth’s diminutive P3ESR that won over the judging panel. They said that this new Harbeth continued to build upon the brand’s long history from the BBC’s pioneering audio research days. “I was reminded in no uncertain terms that we have a golden legacy to nurture and that consumer expectations of Harbeth are very high indeed.” added Alan. The development of the P3ESR commenced four years before its launch and many technical issues needed careful investigation. “The smaller the cabinet, the more challenging the design; every Harbeth user has great expectations of what his Harbeth speakers can deliver, of great bass and incredible clarity even from a speaker no bigger than a shoe box!” After receiving the award Alan thanked the Japanese judges for their long standing appreciation of Harbeth’s British technology and unique sound in the worlds most demanding and fast moving consumer electronics market. “The core of the P3ESR is our own UK designed and UK made bass/mid driver - if you want the last word in natural sound you have to make it here in the UK.” he added.

Harbeth - welcome in Japan for over a generation...

There’s a great affection in Japan for the Harbeth brand, representing the very best of British musical culture and technology. Harbeth first entered the Japanese market thirty four years ago with the innovative HL Monitor, the great great grandfather of the current SuperHL5. Japan has remained one of Harbeth's most enduring and important markets ever since.

“My involvement with the Harbeth company is direct result of my previous employment in a Japanese corporation. It was the greatest education a young man could have in integrity, discipline, visionary thinking and planning. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the fledgling Harbeth company was already established in Japan, supplying some of the world’s most critical and demanding customers” said Harbeth’s Alan Shaw.

In fact, this is Harbeth’s second Stereo Sound major award for Harbeth. “First with the HL Compact and now with the P3ESR, that’s twice Harbeth have been awarded a Component of the Year. “Yes, it’s a real thrill - we are grateful that year on year the voting panel give high praise to the Harbeth sound…” commented Alan. “I’ve just been informed that it’s unprecedented that this year, not only is the new P3ESR singled out for top place in it’s price category, but but the six year old Harbeth Compact 7ES3 comes second. Such long-term product success in the fast changing Japanese audio market talks of real product strength”.

We asked Alan to what he attributed Harbeth’s success in Japan. “It’s the combination of great musicality, exclusive RADIAL™ cone technology, build quality and great distribution.”
A packed hall of dignitaries representing many famous brands

The award ceremony

Awaiting to be called to the stage ...

Receiving the award from Yanagisawa san, senior judge

A toast to the ‘Harbeth sound’
Representing the eyes and ears of the Japanese audio consumer, the Stereo Sound panel of judges considers many factors before selecting the short list for their Audio Grand Prix award. Previously known as the Component of the Year award, the panel’s deliberations are published for Stereo Sound readers. Here, translated into English is a flavour of what led the judges to high praise of the Harbeth P3ESR:

“We’re very happy that this small Harbeth speaker has won this Grand Prix 2010 award. It was chosen regardless of size or price. Anyone who thinks that only very expensive products are chosen for the Grand Prix awards are making a regrettable mistake. We think the sound the P3ESR makes and the loudspeaker itself should be loved - and listening to music is a heart warming experience - isn’t it?

“Present day audio rarely catches the tone of acoustic music - this loudspeaker does, wonderfully. [Miura san said] I have this model at home already and the middle frequencies are a rare and special thing. It has clarity and moreover, warmth. More than twenty years has passed since Alan took over and steadily Harbeth has come into bloom ... The P3ESR is the speaker which can teach the audiophile the real pleasure that’s achievable from owning an attractive traditional cabinet which fits into any interior design, anywhere in the room. And in addition, its easy to drive with even a small amplifier and a tube one too. This loudspeaker comes directly from Alan’s heart...”.

Three Harbeth winners on one page! The C7ES3 marches on ....

The listening panel; a life-long experience in critiquing audio equipment and guiding the consumer
The reception ...

Harbeth Japan (Makoto Sasaomoto, right) and senior-judge Yanapisawa renreniss

Tokyo - a combination of high technology and respect for tradition

With Harada san, publisher of Stereo Sound

In the crowd ....

K. Saito, photographer

Sasamoto san, master of the "one man, one brand" promotional strategy who has built the Harbeth sales organisation in Japan over a generation
Designing audio equipment is a simple linear task. The really challenging jobs are manufacturing to a consistently high standard and logistics - getting the product to the end user in perfect condition and on-time. We’ve been very fortunate to have behind us the teamwork and professionalism of our Japanese importer and behind him, a long sales channel covering the whole of Japan. Without this integrated teamwork, business in a complex environment like Japan would be impossible,” comments Harbeth’s boss.

Harbeth has been selling to Japan for over thirty years, rich experience in Japan’s highly complex, interdependent and relationship driven business environment. There is confidence through the sales channel that the Harbeth UK organisation has the determination and skills to maintain perfect quality and on-schedule production, both mandatory to doing business in Japan. The result is that Harbeth’s reputation amongst Japanese serious-music listeners spans a generation; no surprise that the Harbeth brand is one of the best known and revered for quality and value.

“It always delights me how highly appreciated we are in Japan. Our roots in the BBCs engineering heritage manifests itself as real engineering and excellent value for money. There is now a new younger generation of consumers who identify with the Harbeth sound and can enjoy it at home.”
Alan writes of his time in Japan -

“When an equipment designer and brand owner is interviewed, he has to expect questions ranging from global sales and commercial matters to explaining the smallest technical detail.

“My view is that the more open we are, the more accurately we will be understood by the public. I’ve consistently noticed that Japanese media have a special blend of curiosity about the inner workings of a product (and company) and a terrific love of natural sound. I’m asked in-depth questions about small details of our loudspeakers hidden from view deep inside the design. It’s a real pleasure to be able to ‘talk technical’ and only a pity that we can’t cover everything in a few hours together.”

“Japanese audio magazines have a strong educational role, explaining how and why things work. Audio DIY is still very much active, and that encourages a culture of learning through experimentation and understanding of the costs and benefits of different engineering choices. I feel very much at home with a question such as why is the P3ESRs woofer mounted behind the baffle? Especially when the questioner has actually rolled up his sleeves and made a loudspeaker system himself! It looks easy but unless it’s your specialisation, getting it to sound right is very much more challenging than it appears!”
Tokyo at night - a shoppers paradise

AV stores remain open until late ...

A wonderful evening with the Sasamoto family

The journey home - flying in style thanks to Rolls Royce engines!