

CrystalConnect by Crystal Cable Monet cables

by Alan Sircom

It's been a bit of a tumultuous time for Crystal. OK, in the context of recent world events that started with fire tornadoes and went downhill from there, 'tumultuous' is relative. But a name change or two (first to CrystalConnect, from Crystal Cable, then back to Crystal Cable leaving the new line known as 'CrystalConnect by Crystal Cable'), the departure and return of company ambassador Gabi Rijnveld, the departure of the CEO to bring the company back under family control and the launch of a wholly new line called Monet is fairly big year for the Netherlands-based company's calendar.

The Monet line is part of the company's new Art Series. Replacing lines like Absolute Dream, Art Series cable employs the company's new tenth generation, Infinite Crystal Silver (ICS) conductors. CrystalConnect suggests that, "the increased conductivity and reduced micro distortions of this conductor totally transformed the options open to us in designing and building our cables." A direct improvement brought about by the new conductors is a reduction in the number of signal conductors, reducing total distortion and

capacitance as a result. That reduction in conductors has also allowed the introduction of asymmetric grounding in all Art Series interconnects. Finally, this has led to the development of 'Cross Balanced Construction' for both the company's speaker cables and power cords. It has redesigned the topology throughout the Art Series.

There are three ranges within this new Art Series; Monet, van Gogh and da Vinci as the flagship. Given the Dutch connection, I would have expected van Gogh to be the name of the flagship, but that doesn't really change the balance of things. We tested Monet; it's not exactly an 'entry-level' nor is it 'entry-level' for the Crystal Cable range. But it's the entry point to the Art Series.

The overall look and feel of the cables remain very much in the Crystal line; these are luxury audio cables and that still shines through with the Monet as much as it did with products like Absolute Dream. There was a worry that this cable could be the one that slipped through the net in terms of physical appearance or sonic performance, but on balance, neither of those concepts ring true here.



“There is a terrific sense of ‘musicians in residence’ here, with a very real living presence to the musical performance being played.”



▶ Like Crystal Cable of old, the Monet lines do require a lengthy run-in, but also like Crystal Cable of old, that run-in doesn't need to be hundreds of hours of musical signal. The Blue Horizon Proburn works wonders here, and a week in its clutches brings Monet from extraordinarily talented student to Impressionist master.

Also, common to all Crystal Cable designs, the cable's architecture lends itself toward the widest variety of audio equipment. Granted the price is self-selecting (no one is going to use Monet with entry-level audio gear), but in the context of 'heady wine' Monet is extremely diplomatic and unfussy in terms of playdate partners. I used it with a range of products from Burmester, Gryphon, Leben, Linn and even Aavik (which is a little unfair to both sides, given that Ansus is an Aavik sister brand and a rival to Crystal, but there's little doubting the quality Monet brought to the Scandinavian electronics).

Crystal Cable has always been able to balance the detail, dynamic range and leading edge requirements of a top-end audio system with an uncanny way of teasing out musical information that so often either ignored altogether or sidelined

in place of audio fireworks. This has consistently put Crystal Cable at the top table in any price category, and when it comes to the cost-no-object end of the market, tends to be a consistent leader in the field. If anything, Crystal Cable is the most egalitarian of the top-end cables in that it doesn't impose too strong a character on the sound, yet it brings out the best in very Crystal Cable ways. Monet builds heavily on the strengths of that.

There is a terrific sense of 'musicians in residence' here, with a very real living presence to the musical performance being played. That is something that Absolute Dream did so well and it's something Monet improves upon fairly significantly. Listening to 'The Pull' from the Richmond Fontaine album *We Used to Think the Freeway Sounded Like a River* [El Cortez] and Willy Vlautin's voice takes on even more of a plaintive, sorrowful air. Too often Richmond Fontaine were accused of being derivative of bands like Green On Red and (of course) Gram Parsons. But the band had a very different set of priorities (more murder ballads than pure alt-country Americana) and that is clear through Monet. ▶

“I thought Crystal Cable’s Absolute Dream was ‘a potentially impossible act to follow,’ but Monet shows just how wrong I was.”

▶ I sadly don’t have much Absolute Dream left in my system, just a USB cable in fact. However, this was one of the most clearly identifiable products in the line from that test back in issues 95 and 96, but the comparison shows just how far Monet has come. The level of detail, soundstaging, coherence dynamic range and scale (both in the macro and micro level) transparency, instrument separation, instrument solidity, pace and top-to-bottom accuracy were all improved. But that’s a given; it was that musical integrity and laser-focus on the instrument and its playing that transcends the audio that really shows where Monet excels.

Comparing like with like leads the listener to conclude that Absolute Dream, although excellent, has been eclipsed in all the ways Absolute Dream hitherto led the pack. And this is why Monet is so good; if Crystal had changed the tonality or the focus of the cable, even if it were better in doing some things, it would lack that Crystal Cable signature uniformly good sound that makes the company’s product such an easy recommendation. But where Absolute Dream filled a room with sound like it was some kind of magic trick, Monet shifts the goalposts still further and ‘disappears’ the room. I’m not an ‘eyes shut’ listener when making direct comparisons, but when the longer-term listening takes place, the glasses come off, the eyes shut and I hope to be transported. Take the second movement of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony for example. There was a reissue (at last) of Scherchen’s mono box set on DG in 2020, and it’s fascinating to compare this powerful, almost modernist performance next to more sentimental presentation of Furtwängler or the metronomic von Karajan. That sounds like arch pretentiousness, but playing those three different interpretations of the same movement through Monet just seems natural and right.

Making comparisons with cables from years ago are next to impossible, but the level of awe you feel at the music played with Absolute Dream in the system, the way your system seems to just hang together right and sing, the detail and finesse the cable brings to your system are all replicated here. At the very least, Monet is a real-world challenge to Absolute Dream, and is likely it’s better. Now, while Monet isn’t cheap by most standards, it’s still some way away from the ‘price tag with a blast radius’ prices of Absolute Dream. And that’s impressive.

In a very real way, the revolution that is Monet reminds me a little of the time when Nordost launched V2; the Valhalla-grade cable that showed a clean pair of phono plugs to the prior top of the tree, Odin. Odin 2 was the flagship’s response to its own challenger, but while Nordost was concerned that all those original Odin users might feel disenfranchised that their one-time unassailable flagship had been eclipsed, in fact most listeners welcomed the upgrade in sheer performance terms. It also meant a brisk second-hand trade in Odin and I suspect as the Art Series begins to have its impact, there will be quite a few Absolute Dream-wired systems making the upgrade, and a lot of aspiring Absolute Dream users finally able to realise that, er, dream.

I thought Crystal Cable’s Absolute Dream was “a potentially impossible act to follow”, but Monet shows just how wrong I was, and given CrystalConnect by Crystal Cable Monet is the first of three in the line, and it improves upon the top model in the last range, I’m at a loss for words. Doubtless, the likes of van Gogh and da Vinci will raise the stakes still further, but as we stand today Monet is already in amongst the best of the best. While not everyone either has a sufficiently girthy bank balance or a system of the gravitas expected by Crystal’s Monet, those fortunate enough to have both are in for a treat. +

PRICES AND CONTACT DETAILS

As tested

Monet Interconnect cables (1m pair): £8,400

Monet Speaker cables (3m pair): £22,000 (2x 1m Monet
£5,200, + £5,200 for each additional 2x1m)

Monet USB cable USB A/B 1m pce: £4,140

Monet power cable 1.5m: £6,080

Manufacturer: Crystal Cable/International Audio
Holding BV

URL: crystalcable.com

UK Distributor: Padood

URL: padood.com

Tel: +44(0)1223 653199