

HOWARD BARDACH, C.E.T.

Is the

AUDIOSPECIALIST

The C.E.T. stands for Certified Electronic Technician. He learned literally at his father's knee. His father was an audiophile and an electronic engineer, among other things, who was at the forefront of Hi-Fi in the 1950s. In 1957, he was located to the San Fernando Valley to head up the only West Coast warranty department for Harmon/Kardon. Howard was two years old at that time but he had already begun to soak up the world of audio. Now he's in his 25th year of business fixing your audio problems.

(The following is an interview I conducted with Howard at his store. See ad on Page 27)

Jim Philbrook - JP

Howard Bardach - HB

JP - When did the store open?

HB - The store opened July 13, 1978 officially. That's when my license was taken out. Over 25 years.

JP - This was your dad?

HB - No, my father was in the same kind of business, but when I started he was already forcibly retired due to a car accident. So I started totally on my own in 1978.

JP - Was that here?

HB - No, it started out in my bedroom dresser and then I moved it into the garage. I moved out of there four years later into my first storefront, though it really wasn't a storefront, it was an office building on Laurel Canyon Blvd. I was there for about four years. It was about 500 square feet and that got to be too small. Then I had my first storefront in the same building but at ground level. Then in 1989 I needed a bigger place again and I moved to Tujunga Avenue in Studio City. I was there until 1995 when I moved to where we are at present on Ventura Blvd. Believe me, I hate moving!

JP - What's the biggest difference from

when you started till now - other than the fact you're not working from dresser drawers?

HB - Everything now is disposable. It's built to fall apart and not to last. Today's equipment has a lot more features and can do a lot more. But the reliability and durability - it's garbage. There's a tremendous demand for the product and they're turning it out in droves. Even Sony and Panasonic - their machines are not made by them, and they're made the cheapest way possible and still run.

JP - So, you're talking mostly about CD players, DVDs?

HB - CD and DVD players. VCRs, well they're a dead item, televisions are too. A 27" TV you can buy brand new for under \$300. Who's going to repair it?

JP - What about the high-end things?

HB - That's a whole different thing. The high-end audio, there's still a tremendous demand for people to work on it because it is a high ticket item. It's not the majority though. It's a big part of it, but it's not the majority (of the business). What has been a bigger part is the older stuff from the '40s, '50s, '60s and '70s. People want those things repaired because they realize it was built to last and it sounds better. We're not even talking about the tube vs. solid state sound quality debate. Just something that will work, last and you can easily figure out how turn it on and off - know how to operate it. For example, the Marantz receivers from the '70s. They were built to last. They've lasted longer than the company. That's a big part of the business.

JP - So for you, it's not people bringing in a CD player.

HB - Unless it's something that's sophisticated or special, but for the most part, very few come through.

JP - So then, audiophile equipment from the past...

HB - Yes, and current, and Hi-Fi from the '50s. I do a lot of them, turntables especially because of the RCN ad have become a tremendous part of the business. I always felt that it would, but not as big as it has been.

JP - They want to play those records?

HB - Yes, and they want to be educated in how to use a record player, because almost everybody who comes in and wants to buy a record player, they don't even know the difference between a 2-speed or a 3-speed. I have to educate them. We've now entered a different generation. People who were very familiar with record players, many have passed away, and now there's a new generation who just don't know about them although they've heard about it.

JP - I would think that if they're under thirty they might be mystified.

HB - Right. A lot of them have told me they were given their parents' collection and they want to play it. From classical to *John Barleycorn Must Die*.

JP - You do new audiophile equipment too?

HB - Oh, yes. In fact I do repair quite a few items under warranty. I'm factory authorized for quite a few major brands.

(Editor's Note: To find out which ones, go to www.audiospecialist.com. Also, you can view customer letters, a list of what's on sale, a profile, policies and more.)

JP - So people who have purchased equipment after visiting an audiophile trade show, you'd be the guy, if something seems wrong, who'd show them where they messed up when they hooked it all together?

HB - Right, and it can happen that the instruction manual is wrong. They're written in Korean or Taiwanese and translated into English. There's always room for error.



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