

India

The living heritage of India's unmatched forts and palaces.

Sri Lanka

On the tea trails of the Bogawantalawa Valley.

سريلانكا

على منحدرات الشاي في وادي "بوجاوانتالوا".

العند

كنوز الهند التراثية الخالدة من القلاع والقصور التي لا تضاهى.

QATAR
AIRWAYS القطرية

المرحبا
ORYX





NAME

Bob Stuart

OCCUPATION

Co-founder & CTO

CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER FOR AUDIO SPECIALIST MERIDIAN, Bob Stuart is on a life-long quest for perfect audio.

Words by Karen Martin

If you're a hi-fi enthusiast you will already know his name, but for those of us who just listen to our music collection through a set of computer speakers, Bob Stuart's technical knowledge and enthusiasm for all things audio will make you want to throw out those crackling, tinny speakers for good.

Meridian's philosophy is to accurately reproduce the sound of music as it was when it was created. And, as a piano instrumental bursts through the speakers at Meridian HQ, I experience this phenomenon

first-hand. I'm able to sense which way the piano is facing and where the pianist is sitting, despite the fact there are just two speakers and a CD player in front of me. "The structure of the speakers separates sounds and spaces so that you can hear where the sounds are coming from," explains Bob. "The more accurately sound is reproduced, the more you can connect with it."

This one sentence sums up Bob Stuart's objective; his fascination with the psychological impact of music and his almost obsessive



pursuit of reproducing the purest sound is what drives the technical side of the company and continues to inspire the constant innovation behind its suite of products. "Music is important," he says, "and we're constantly trying to improve the experience of listening to it."

Bob studied psychoacoustics – a branch of psychology concerned with the human perception of sound – electronic engineering, and management at Imperial College, London, and his passion for music soon led him to specialise in audio design.

"It started with a love of music – I wanted to listen to it more," he says. "I had a parallel interest in acoustics and electronics and so, naturally, I was interested in designing music systems as well as listening to them. I believe they should be easy to use, work brilliantly, and look great; form should reflect function."

And so he found the perfect partnership in Meridian's other founder, Allen Boothroyd, who had trained as a mechanical engineer and went on to study industrial design at the Royal College of Art. They met in Cambridge, where they discovered shared interests and philosophies in audio equipment design, and founded Meridian Audio in 1977.

More than 30 years on, Meridian has received 165 awards for 156 products and innovations to date, including an unprecedented trio of the coveted British Design

Council award for Outstanding British Products.

Their designs have also gained much critical and industrial acclaim, setting new standards for iconic design. This is evidenced by one of Boothroyd and Stuart's earliest creations – the classic 1970s Lecson Audio product line, which can be found on permanent display at the New York Museum of Modern Art.

"Meridian was unusual at the time," says Bob. "Audio was ugly and we made it good-looking. To this day, we never design a machine and put a cute box around it, nor the other way round. The two things evolve together."

Beyond creating aesthetically-pleasing design, Bob's desire to ensure that the quality of an original recording is maintained indefinitely has led to a number of unique technologies being developed by Meridian over the course of the company's history, and has set standards for the rest of the industry.

He was involved in the very earliest stages of the development of compact disc (CD) through his connections with Philips in Holland and, in 1983, Meridian Audio was the first British company to manufacture a CD player – winning awards for the best-sounding CD player in seven major countries. In 1990, the company was the first to introduce active loudspeakers (loudspeakers with power amplifiers inside the cabinet) produced for the home.

MERIDIAN
HQ

In 2004, Meridian relocated to its current and impressive headquarters and factory building in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.



It had originally been built for the short-lived TAG McLaren audio brand. This modern facility came complete with anechoic chamber, EMC test suite, and several purpose-built listening/screening rooms with full acoustic treatments, which Meridian has made its own.



Meridian also created the first digital surround-sound processor and the first loudspeaker using digital signal processing. All of these have been acclaimed for their performances and have won awards in major markets around the world.

But the most notable technology that Meridian has developed – and that has defined how we experience home entertainment today – is the Meridian Lossless Packing standard. It was adopted as the standard compression method for DVD-audio as well as the sound on high-definition formats including HD DVD and Blu-Ray.

Possibly the most 'fun' product in the Meridian range is the Sooloos digital media system, which can store all your music and make it instantly accessible via the touchscreen. "It's based on the concept of 'if you had all the music

in the world, what would you listen to?" says Bob. You can search and browse by date, genre, mood... and it will even intelligently move through your music when your playlist runs out. "We've never tested the capacity to its limit but we think it may be around five million albums – more than you can listen to in a lifetime!"

Meridian designs and manufactures all of its products from its custom-built headquarters in Cambridgeshire in the UK. "It's an important part of the ethos of the company that the products are hand-built, well designed, and very high quality, and that we have a workforce that appreciates that," says Bob. "From the 100-plus people that work for us, most have been with us since the beginning. It helps that they appreciate what we do and have an interest in the end product."

I suspect that when you work at Meridian and your job is your passion you don't mind taking it home with you. "I have a continuous love of music," says Bob. "Every room I have has a system." So what does he listen to? "Working in acoustics you have to be interested in all genres of music – you end up listening to all kinds. But if left to my own devices I'd mostly listen to chamber and choral music."

Bob is the first to admit that Meridian equipment has largely been the domain of the audiophile. "Most of the population are happy with their MP3 player and headphones," says Bob, "But our ethos of 'sound good, look great, built to last' means that buying speakers, for example, is a life investment – like buying a musical instrument. It's a life journey."

LEADERS IN DESIGN

Allen Boothroyd's and Bob Stuart's **Lecson ACT1** and **AP1** units were aimed at the wealthy audio customer in 1973. The unique rectangular preamplifier and cylindrical amplifier set new design standards for audio equipment throughout the world.



The sleek outer casing in perspex and aluminium, contrasted with colour-coded slider controls, earned it a British Design Council Award in 1974. To this day they are revered by Lecson collectors worldwide for both their styling and performance.

