

Meridian D600 looks and sounds like it's from Tiffany's

Sometimes the desire strikes to stroll into Tiffany's just for a look around. It's fun to rub elbows with class, even if much of it is unaffordable.

Recently a speaker system with matching CD player arrived for review from Meridian of England. Setting up Meridian equipment in your living room is reminiscent of shopping at Tiffany's.

Meridian faces fierce competition. Some companies offer better-sounding components and others design more stylish gear, but few offer the combination of simple elegance and technological prowess embodied by Meridian equipment.

The D600 Digital Active Loudspeaker forms the centerpiece (or more accurately the left and right) of Meridian's newest system. Since its inception about a decade ago, Meridian has advocated active loudspeakers. The term active means that the speakers contain their own power amplifiers. You connect a preamplifier (or CD player) directly to the loudspeakers.

One step ahead of the competition, and one step farther than its own previous models, Meridian now includes the digital-to-analog converter (D/A) in its D600 active speakers. That means you can feed the digital output from a CD player, DAT player or digital signal processor directly to the speaker. The speaker even includes a fiber-optic input for use with optical digital outputs. Many if not most experts agree that converting digital back into analog as late (as close to the speaker) as possible results in improved sound when executed properly.

Meridian builds not just one but

three 65-watt amplifiers into each enclosure. One amp powers the 6-inch woofer; another, the 6-inch midwoofer; and the third, the 1-inch tweeter. Using three amps for three speaker drivers is called triamplification. Audio purists laud the fact that triamplification matches each speaker to its amplifier with near perfection.

A block of cast aluminum encompasses the 37-button remote control. The buttons actually have the shape and surface area of the narrow end of a paperclip. The Meridian 209 System Handset feels like no remote you've used before. Rather than pointing it at the preamp or CD player, you aim it at the D600 speakers. The speakers relay the commands to the appropriate component.

The speakers include a green LED (light-emitting diode) display in a strip across the top that shows the relative volume level and the source you've selected. Press a command on the remote and the righthand display switches to the display of the selected component.

With this system, you can hide the components in a closet or cupboard, but the diminutive, attractive Meridian components deserve to be displayed in the open. The tall, slender, waist-high column speakers look like they should be displaying jewels at Tiffany's. Meridian crafts rectangular boxes that please the eye, no mean feat in the world of speakers.

Can looks alone justify the \$5,500 price? They can when the speakers sound as good as the D600s. Certainly, the KEF 107 and B&W Matrix 801, Series 2, give you more and fuller sound for the money. However, few

speakers deliver sound as precise and finely detailed as the Meridian D600s. They reproduce sound with an incredible clarity only matched by electrostatic speakers.



For truly elegant sound and appearance the Meridian D600s justify their extravagant price. When you combine them with matching Meridian components (the CD player adds about \$2,000), you can create an audio system with the same elan and panache as a trip to Tiffany's.

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