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**PAUL WILBUR KLIPSCH**

**1904 - 2002**

**BY**  
**JOHN F. ALLEN**

HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO™



# HPS-4000®

## HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO

*FIRST IN DIGITAL STEREO*

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## ***PAUL WILBUR KLIPSCH***

***1904 - 2002***

It is with great sadness that I note the passing of Paul W. Klipsch. Paul was one of the true legendary pioneers in audio. To many, including myself, he stood above everyone else when it came to the understanding and creation of loudspeakers.

Paul Klipsch was in his late thirties when he began to study the problem of sound reproduction in a serious way. He had always been interested in radio and sound. In fact, he built his first radio before the first commercial broadcasts. But prior to the 1940's, he worked primarily as an engineer and geologist. Following another passion, trains, he supervised the maintenance of seven electric locomotives in Tocopilla, Chile from 1928-1931.

During the second world war, Paul was stationed at the Southwest Proving Grounds in Hope, Arkansas. It was during those years that the work that would make him a legend would begin to take shape. The initial work on his most famous loudspeaker, the Klipschorn, took several years. This was an extremely clever design for a horn loaded loudspeaker in that the bass horn was

folded around itself and used the corner of a room as part of the speaker. After the end of the war, Paul committed his life to “building loudspeakers.” He founded a new company called Klipsch and Associates in 1946 and ultimately began building and selling Klipschorns.

At the end of his life, the Klipschorn had become the most successful and long lived product in the history of audio. Today, in 2002, over 60 years after it’s initial design, the Klipschorn is still in production and still unrivaled in sound reproduction for the home.

Many who have written about Paul Klipsch’s life have noted that he inspired numerous careers in audio. This is certainly true. My own career is a prime example. The first time I heard a Klipschorn in the home of my next door neighbor, I knew I had heard something extraordinary. What I didn’t know is that my life would be changed forever. It was another few years before I could save enough for my own Klipschorns, but once I had them, I could actually listen to music with the kind of satisfaction otherwise found only in a live setting. Later, with Paul’s help, guidance and especially his speaker systems, I was able to bring this kind of quality to symphony and ballet performances where sound reinforcement was required. Then in 1979, I founded my present company and began my career in motion picture sound, including writing for BOXOFFICE magazine. Since then my work has taken me completely around the world while accumulating over 1.2 million miles. Without Klipsch’s loudspeakers, I never would have bothered to do any of this, as nothing else would have or could have inspired me so.

Though widely known for his brilliance and sense of humor, to my surprise, Paul was also a controversial figure. There have been audio engineers who have strongly disputed Klipsch’s design approaches as well as his published writings. However, as far as I know, none of the dissenters has produced a superior loudspeaker, let alone one that has stood the test of time for 60 years and counting.

Not many know this, but it is hard to find a loudspeaker behind a movie screen that does not employ design features that were either invented by Paul Klipsch or enhanced by him. His patented K-5 treble horn of 1951 has been widely copied in one way or another. It was the first of what became known as the constant directivity horn. Some thirty years later, these horns became widely used in movie theatres, while Klipsch had already completed two more product design generations. In 1982, he designed a tweeter for my sound systems that compensated for the coverage angle distortions caused by movie screens. It wasn’t for another seventeen years that other manufacturers followed suit.

In my view, this was typical of Paul Klipsch’s career. He was years and often decades ahead of his time.

From a summary of his life published at the time of his death, we learn that: “The honors and awards bestowed upon Paul W. Klipsch are numerous and varied and in part due to his

engineering genius. He was a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc. (IEEE), The Audio Engineering Society (AES) and The Acoustical Society of America (ASA). He was a member of Mu Phi Pi, which through Sigma Tau, became Tau Beta Pi, New Mexico Alpha Chapter and Gamma Chapter at Stanford as well as a member in Sigma Xi, an honorary research society. He is listed in Who's Who in Engineering and Who's Who in Electronics. In 1966, he was awarded the New Mexico State University Alumni Award. In 1978, he was awarded the Audio Engineering Society's Silver Medal 'for innovative contributions to loudspeaker design and studies of acoustic distortion.' He received an Honorary Doctor of Law Degree from New Mexico State University, in 1981.

"In 1983, he was inducted into the Audio Hall of Fame. He was named Citizen of the Year in the city of Hope in 1985. In 1989, he received the Hi-Fi News Award for Achievement in Audio. 1993, 1994 and 1995 saw the Dedications of the Paul W. Klipsch Lecture Hall, the dedication of the Paul W. Klipsch Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and finally the Klipsch School of Electrical Engineering, all at New Mexico State University. The city of Hope again honored this great man in its dedication of the Paul W. Klipsch Municipal Auditorium in June of 1995. In 1997, New Mexico State University dedicated the Klipsch Museum, providing a scholarly and entertaining view of engineering history.

"Without question, his most distinguished award was received in 1997, when he was inducted and enshrined in the Engineering and Science Hall of Fame for acoustic, ballistic and geophysical contributions. With this honor he became memorialized with such members as Thomas Edison, Jonas Salk and the Wright Brothers. Each individual is honored for his or her outstanding achievement and contribution to society."

Paul Klipsch left this world better than he found it. Lovers of music and sound around the world will forever be in his debt and will forever enjoy their lives more because of his great contributions to loudspeaker design and stereophonic sound. For myself, I can only say, I owe him everything.

John F. Allen  
Newton, Massachusetts

*Note: For those interested in reading more about Paul Klipsch may get the recently published book: PAUL WILBUR KLIPSCH THE LIFE... THE LEGEND, by Maureen Barrett and Michael Klementovich. The book is available directly from the publisher, Rutledge Books, Inc.; 1 800 278-8533. ISBN: 1-58244-226-6. The book is also available through bookstores as well as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com).*

**May 8, 2002**

**AN ERA ENDS by Don Davis**

**The passing of Paul Wilbur Klipsch, May 6, 2002, truly marks the end of an era. Inventor, aviator, shooter, and successful industrialist, Paul was an early contributor to seismology (in the 1930s), an army colonel in WWII ("fit the battle of Arkansas" at the Southwest Proving Grounds), a shooter at Camp Perry, a pilot that survived literally thousands of hours in the air, and a mentor to innumerable young men who went on to careers in audio.**

**While Hope, Arkansas has a prominent sign outside of town declaring itself the birthplace of a politician, what brought us to Hope time and again like pilgrims to a religious shrine (awe mixed with deep respect and a privileged sense of meeting a pioneer giant of audio) was Paul Klipsch. Pretentiousness was always responded to by one of his famous B.S. Yellow Buttons. Anti-gravity papers at AES conventions resulted in the whites of his eyes rolling up - a sure guide to us younger listeners that something was awry. Paul was a natural "myth" maker.**

**When a man of genius chooses to play all of life's roles with zest, vigor, and a "gifted one's" perspective of mankind's folly, the rest of the world tends to regard such genius as irascible, querulous - a mad genius. I am privileged to have lived long enough to realize how truly gifted Paul was and that I had the good sense when he was in his nineties to go to Hope and tell him so. Paul outlasted his peers (he was 98) and surmounted the phonies and became a legend in his own time. Fame, fortune and the good life were worn by Paul as if total success in life was compulsory.**

**Writing about Paul Klipsch has many of the same hazards as writing about General Patton. Both had an impish quality that reveled in misdirecting the observer away from their remarkable intellectual accomplishments and toward their outrageous contributions to trivia. Paul was most enlightening when cornered by a question on which he had to start from scratch. You then witnessed the raw power of a great mind trapped into an unaccustomed challenge, and the angles from which he attacked the problem would, you quickly found, never have occurred to you in a million years.**

**Written on the side of his airplane were the words I feel best describe his passing, "They that wait upon the Lord.....shall mount up with wings as eagles." Isaiah 40:31. Indeed Gabriel may well be designing a new horn.**

**May, 2002**

**My Sympathies for the world's loss of a truly gifted and unique genius who made an indelible mark on the world of audio and the lives of many, including my own. My life and work have been guided in some way, though obscure at times, by Paul's fascination with the reproduction of "music" ever since I heard a neighbor's "Shorthorn" in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I was determined to learn more about this "mystic" from Hope who built loudspeakers of such uncanny realism. Learn I did, exchanged correspondence, visited frequently and was asked to fill a vacancy in engineering in November of 1974.**

**This was a different world! I also began to realize how special my acceptance into this flock was. As the saying goes, you had to pinch yourself to make sure you weren't just dreaming a dream! I later discovered that many engineers would have given their right leg for my position with Paul. What a responsibility and performance I had to live up to. As I heard Paul say of his acceptance of the AES silver metal award in 1978, "I have stood on the shoulders of giants." I am proud to have at least rubbed elbows with one of those giants...PWK!**

**Gary C. Gillum  
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