
Subject: Successful Frustration

Posted by [gofar99](#) on Wed, 05 Jun 2024 01:29:38 GMT

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Hi Everyone. I posted this on diyaudioprojects.com as well sine they are the site hosting many of the trials and tribulations over the years.

"Successful Frustration"

How can you be both really glad you accomplished something and frustrated at the same time. Easy if you are an audiophile and someone who designs and builds their own gear. It has taken just over 15 years to achieve this paradox. Before then I had what many would consider pretty good gear. A Phillips 212 turntable with empire cartridge, a Marantz 1060 console amplifier (I still have it and it is connected to the PC I am writing this on) and some diy 30 cm speakers made by Utah in 5 cubic foot boxes. Then I bought my first tube amplifier kit...you guessed it an S-5. There were a few wrinkles with it. First it didn't have all the correct parts and second the company at the time was not as customer friendly as I would have expected. Eventually that got sorted out and I built the amp. Even though it was not as nice sounding as I would have liked the tube sound was alluring. Several of us on the WEB made various mods to it and improved it a bit. At this point tubes were something I had used in amateur radio and were not mystical as some folks think. I figured I could make a better amplifier. Thus, the first what came to be called the Oddwatts were born. Rather modest at first with push pull EL84s running class A for about 5 watts. (the first Poddwatt that still works just fine) They were certainly not perfect, but were much nicer sounding than the S-5. And to be sure a bit more costly. I upped the game with bigger amps over the years until the largest used KT120s. They all are a similar design configuration. What I had stumbled upon worked very well and there didn't (and still doesn't) seem to be a reason to change the design. Along the way I designed companion line stage preamps (the Forewatts) and phonograph preamps (the Grooves). For the last few years, I have been making subtle changes to all of them in the pursuit of the best possible sound without having to mortgage the house to pay for them. Simultaneously I wanted the designs to be diy friendly. All of them are, but a few require some skills in building them. Now, comes the accomplishment part, I wanted the amps to sound better than what was my reference amplifiers. These are a pair of Marantz receivers from the mid 1970s. This was a time period that the brand was still cranking out superior gear. For a number of years later they seem to have deviated from that concept. They are now once again back to that level of performance and quality. At the same time, I wanted the preamplifiers to match in excellence. I confirmed today that my set of tube amps and preamps at least to my ears and confirmed by test data on the bench are more musical and better sounding than all my references. Only one phono preamp (solid state) is a little quieter. Just a few DBs. In the minus 90 to -95 range none of it is audible. A lot of this is naturally subjective. My most definitive test is what I call the "shiver" factor. Most serious listeners will recognize this easily. An alternative is the "hairs on the neck" factor. In either case, the sound that causes you to shiver (or have neck prickling) is the most realistic to you. My personal gear now does this more often than the reference gear. Thus, at least in my perspective I have accomplished what I set out to do years ago. For information, the rest of the system consists of an Empire 598 with Jelco 370H arm and Grado Sonata II, a diy ex Dual 701 (the drive only as the rest was toast) also with a Jelco 370H and a Dynavector Ruby Karat 23MR-RS, a pair of 200 liter subs with 30 cm Altec Lansing drivers, a pair of Martin Logan ESLs, and assorted things like an Akai reel to reel, a OPPO SE player, a Nakamichi cassette recorder, a dedicated PC, and for compatibility, a

Bluetooth receiver. Now, the frustration part. What to design or build next? I suppose many other folks have been at this juncture. I accomplished what I wanted to do 15 years ago and now have no clear path to go forward. More tweaking of the gear is unlikely to produce anything significant. I have no desire to go back into digital stuff. I did that for many years and it holds no interest now. I dabble in solid state things that are useful like phonograph preamps. They are quite excellent and need no further development. If this were a job, I would say it is time to retire. But since I did that twice in the past and most recently in 2011 it doesn't seem to apply. Perhaps I should just spend all the time listening to the massive number of LPs and tapes I have. Probably not. So, I guess I need to find some new type of gear to design and build. I hope you all are as successful in accomplishing your goals right up to the point of "successful frustration".

Subject: Re: Successful Frustration

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Wed, 05 Jun 2024 11:42:19 GMT

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Maybe cultivate interest in something totally unrelated to audio. Or learning to play some musical instrument? Authors have the dreaded writers block. Baseball sluggers have their slumps. Sometimes I guess the mind becomes satiated with what the challenge is to pursue. Anyway, I could tell by your stream of non paragraphs the frustration you're experiencing. Enjoy your accomplishments and the music collection for awhile. I bet something gets your creative juices flowing again. You know that old proverb. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Subject: Re: Successful Frustration

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Wed, 05 Jun 2024 12:29:00 GMT

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Dude, I'm totally with you on that. But - to me - that's the goal. If a design does everything you want it to do, what could be better than that?!! Enjoy it! And in your case - even better - make it available for others to enjoy too! Support them in building it!

Same thing for me and my speakers. The last "iterative" design change was updating the three Pi model to use the B&C 12PLB100 midwoofer. And that was simply because the high-end midwoofer option that had been available up until that time was slated to be discontinued, so I needed a replacement.

The last "major" design change was adding the H290C waveguide to the models. And even that wasn't really major because I had been using a similar wood horn/waveguide for years. So it was an iterative improvement too. It just seemed major 'cause I had to have an injection mold made for it.

I'm glad my designs are mature. To me, that is the "promised land." Audio isn't like computers, where designs are obsolete as soon as they go into production. In audio, a design may be state

of the art for decades. Of course, some audio designs aren't, and can use continual improvement. But it certainly is possible to have an audio design that does everything "right" and doesn't benefit from incremental improvement.

So I applaud you for your Oddwatt designs!

Subject: Re: Successful Frustration
Posted by [Madison](#) on Sun, 23 Jun 2024 19:25:50 GMT
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Wow, you've had some big adventures in building custom amps. I can relate to your feelings, gofar99, but do you think some of your disappointment could be due to the aging process? Our hearing, and how we perceive sound, changes as we age. I think getting older has affected how I experience music. I've come to the conclusion that things will never sound as good as they did when I was a teen. All the equipment in the world won't change that.

Subject: Re: Successful Frustration
Posted by [gofar99](#) on Mon, 24 Jun 2024 02:29:38 GMT
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Hi, It is true that the ears were better a while back. However that was not the issue. I had goals in frequency response, distortion, signal to noise and most importantly making the designs diy friendly. Essentially, I accomplished them about 5 years ago and have been tweaking a bit since then. I felt that it was possible to improve the S/N a bit even though it was really just fine at about -85 (inaudible) or so in all designs. By careful adjustments and indeed some changes in the designs I got all past -90 and some nearly to -100 (all in dbv wide band). BTW a comprehensive test project is still ongoing in the power supply area. I made a sophisticated test set up to try variations of transformers, SMPS, AC to DC supplies, all sorts of filters and such using one of the phono preamps as a test device. This way I can actually measure the effects of any combination to see the merits or deficiencies in regard to the performance of an actual audio device. It will take some time as I figure there are over 100 possible combinations that are possible. So far, the best has been an AC to DC SMPS for the heaters and an Edcor transformer with a bridge rectifier and 6 R/C pi sections. I will show the results on the web when I have finished. So short of engaging in something new I am temporarily at a standstill for other stuff.