

Review of Pickup van den Hul Colibri XGW Grand Cru Elite, by Holger Barske, 07/2022 on :

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## The quintessence, the pickup from van den Hul



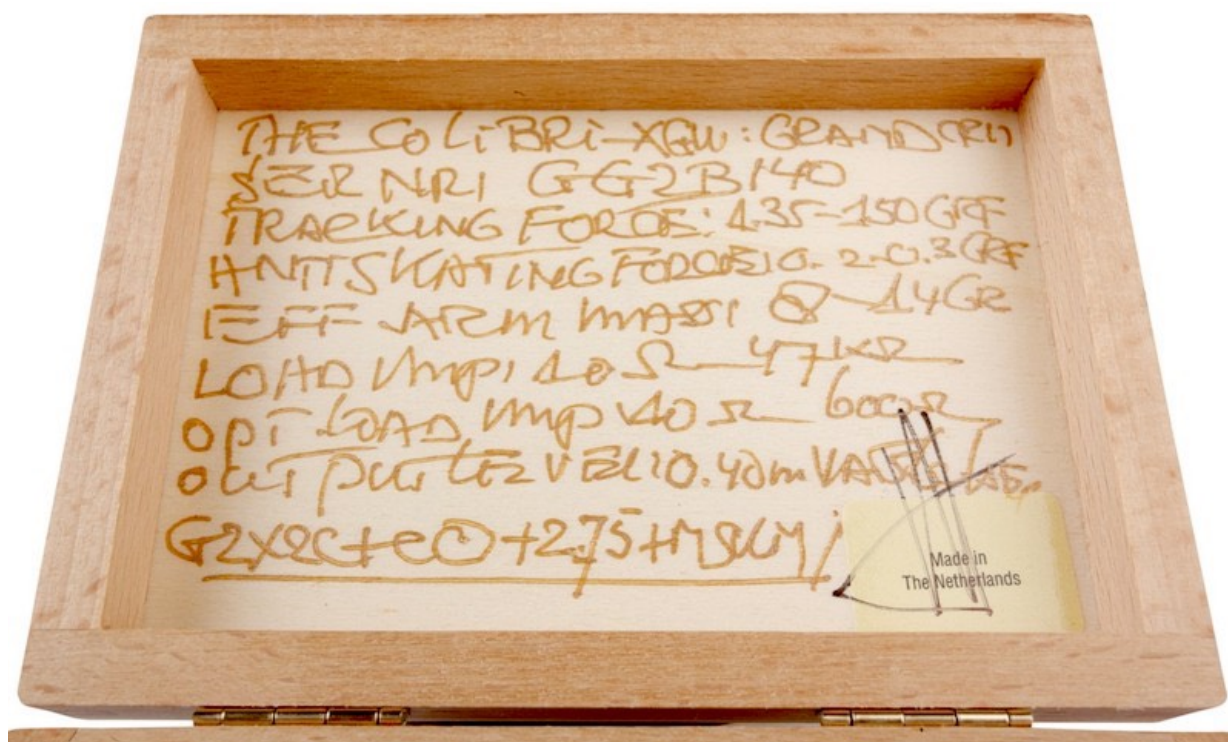
Some opportunities are so improbable that you just can't miss them. This is one of those.

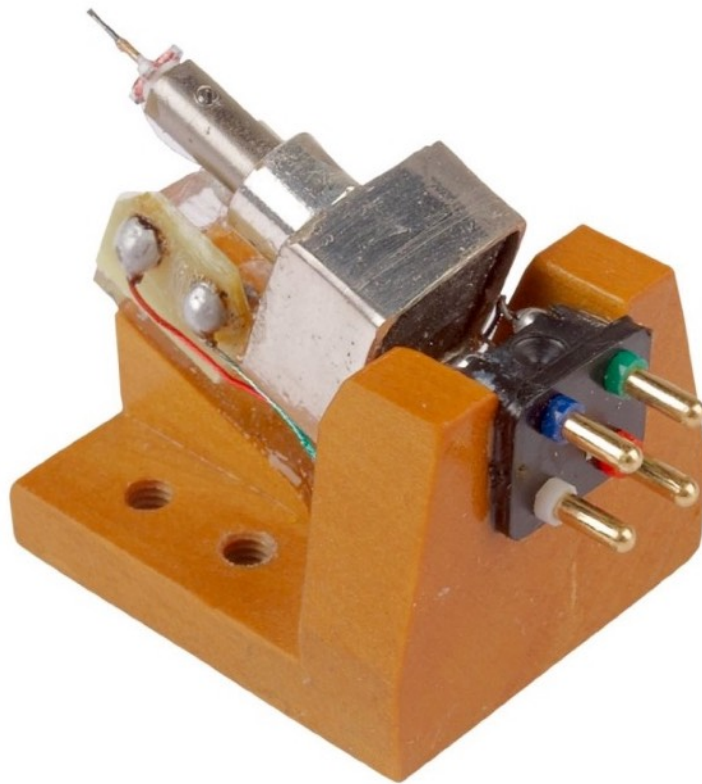
### context

Yes, the Dutch pickup expert Aalt van den Hul is still active. Although he is probably around 85 years old by now, that in no way prevents him from still thinking about how to extract sounds even better from the record groove. The accumulation of his efforts in this regard is the "Colibri" pickup series, which he has been continuously developing for many years. The latest statement on the subject is based on the type designation monster "Colibri XGW Grand Cru Elite" and represents the culmination of the busy Dutchman's pickup creation to date. Cost: 12,900 euros. And I'm sure you understand that I didn't want to miss the opportunity to deal with such a precious item.

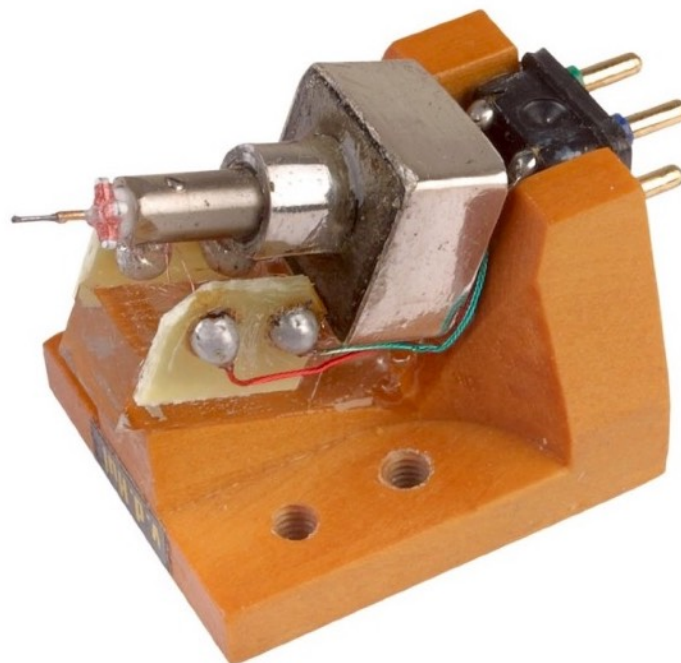


Typical van den Hul: the hand-written wooden box as packaging





*Striking: the large neodymium magnet that generates the field*



Discussing the price is pointless. If the artists' fee has to be in this area, then so be it. You can undoubtedly also listen to excellent music with pickups that cost orders of magnitude less money.



## Construction

The special position of the Grand Cru Elite is not immediately obvious. Connoisseurs of the matter easily identify it as a colibri. The decisive point in the series is the unconditional reduction to the essentials. All generator components have been designed to be as compact as possible in order to reduce distortion and noise to a minimum. But you have an unclouded view of every detail of the pickup, which undoubtedly also reveals the slightly robust charm of a pickup built by hand from the ground up. A tiny diamond with the famous van den Hul 1S cut sits at the tip of the boron needle carrier, which has been continuously refined since 1973. The coils to be moved are wound by hand from gold wire, and this time the master takes very little of it:



*The coils at the front of the cantilever became shorter than usual*

The output voltage is still an uncomplicated 0.4 millivolts, somewhere the master will have found a few screws that he could turn in terms of effectiveness. There isn't much "housing" for the Colibris, just a wooden bracket that serves as a support for the generator. Its material has always been a point that van den Hul varied. I don't know exactly what he takes from the new top model, it is obviously a very hard, finely grained and very homogeneous type of wood. Interestingly, the fastening threads are cut directly into the material, previously threaded sleeves were used at this point.

## Assembly

van den Hul recommends a tonearm with an effective mass of between 8 and 14 grams, which is a little below what my usual 12-inchers can handle. So I tried my luck with an SME 309 (by ten grams), but ultimately had better experiences with a Micro Seiki MA-707, which has an adjustable effective mass – I may have ended up at the upper end of the recommended value. I approached the topic of "recording" with the van den Hul a little differently than usual, that is to say: after an initial functional test, it played plenty of sides of the record that nobody was listening to. In my first sonic encounter with such an extreme nature, I simply wanted to avoid getting an inconclusive impression. This gave me an opportunity to think about

## sound

Of course I decided on Tools' overarching album "Fear Innoculum", because I basically know very quickly where I stand. 100 ohm termination, the amplification was taken over by the well-established [MalValve preamp three phono](#) and after a few seconds it was clear – okay, this is something special. It is this intuitively very satisfying feeling of "this is a really good sounding system" that immediately sets in before you start looking for the causes. The fact is: The Grand Cru Elite is pure magic. It conveys an atmospheric density like hardly any other pickup I have ever experienced. And again, I learned things about Danny Carey's incredible drumming that I didn't realize before. There's so much expression, so much skill, so much precision in it - I'll never understand how he does it. After the brittle perfection of the Americans, I spent an entire evening listening to albums by the space rockers Electric Moon. It's hard to describe, the natural way in which one is drawn into the music, how easily and intuitively access to what is offered opens up. You want it more tangible? Okay: The van den Hul thrives on an extreme love of detail, which even tops that of the excellent Ortofon Per Windfeld Ti and is probably why it sounds so uniquely natural. It delivers a voluminous, rolling low end that suits it perfectly, but not with the merciless precision of the [DS Audio DS003](#) can keep up. It is happy about very clean records, because it impressively pulls every speck of dust into the public eye. Then it also works with the outstandingly expressive voice reproduction with Nina Simone, whose devotion, even latent anger, I have never experienced so unmistakably

## Conclusion

Analog madness? Definitive. But one with a method that goes hand in hand with unique expressiveness and maximum feeling for the information in the groove.