

# REVIEWS

## Gold Note CD1000 MkII CD player/DAC

The Best of Both Worlds...

By Rob Johnson



Even though there is a wealth of streaming options available to music lovers, the CD is quietly making a bit of a comeback. Not everyone wants to be an IT person, and some really enjoy the simplicity of putting a disc in and pushing play. Not to mention, there are some great deals to be had in the used CD bins.

Over the last several years, vinyl's comeback reinvigorated the love for turntables. Following on the footsteps of this old-school resurgence CDs are experiencing a surprise comeback too. Embracing this trend, Italy's Gold Note seeks to bring together the best of CD playback and streaming into a single package with the CD-1000 player and DAC. Indeed, the CD-1000 performs admirably in extracting the most from CDs. However, it also features a USB input so the internal DAC can deliver double-duty in decoding high-resolution PCM files. While Gold Note player cannot decode SACD or DVD-A disks, DSD, or MQA files, listeners will enjoy its prowess with a vast majority of their music collection.

### Behold gold

After unpacking the CD1000, it's evident that Italy's Gold Note puts a lot of effort into the aesthetics of their products to complement the equally-beautiful sound.

The player comes in a variety of finishes. In addition to the gold anodizing reflecting the company's namesake, Gold Note offers black and silver options to match other downstream components. While some manufacturers anodize only the thick aluminum faceplate to save production cost, the CD-1000 surfaces all reflect the owner's color choice. Atop the CD-1000, even the ventilation slits prove attractive. It also features a custom-made aluminum CD drawer rather than the cheap plastic ones used in most players. The unit's heft also reflects serious build quality. The player weighs in at 33 pounds (15kg) with external dimensions of 17 inches wide, 14.75 inches deep, and 5.3 inches tall (430mm X 375mm X 135mm).

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The front panel controls offer the expected options for a CD player. Eject, play/pause, track skipping or scanning, stop, and standby buttons integrate gracefully into the faceplate. A digital display showcases the CD track number and elapsed time. There is no button to choose the input selections, however. For that, one needs to use the included plastic remote control.

Owners have a choice of RCA or AES/EBU (XLR) analog outputs. They can also use the S/PDIF coax output to use the CD-1000 as a transport to an external DAC. However, it would take an exceptional DAC to expect an improvement over the one built into the Gold Note.

Input wise, those using the player as a standalone DAC can connect to it from other sources via Toslink, S/PDIF, or USB. Regardless of input choice, the player's excellent Burr-Brown PCM1796 dual-mono chip takes the reins for decoding digital information.

#### Designed for upgrades

Gold Note employs a modular design for the CD player. While the internal dual-mono power supply does a marvelous job on its own, an owner can upgrade the player with a choice of two external Class A tube Output Stage Buffers, the TUBE-1012 taps the aid of twelve 6N1P triode tubes, while the smaller TUBE-1006 sibling uses six. Besides are also available two external inductive power supply the 9 transformers PSU-1250 and the 5 transformers PSU-1000. According to Gold Note, either power supply bests the internal version. These upgrades don't come cheap, retailing around \$7,000 or \$4,000, respectively for both TUBE and PSU. Adding that to the \$5,000 cost of the player itself represents a substantial investment.



We'll need to take Gold Note's word for the sound improvements these power supplies offer since we did not have either on hand from which to base a comparison. For those CD-1000 owners who seek to unveil every sonic nuance from their CD-1000, the upgrade may prove worthwhile. CD-1000 owners who choose to go that route can acquire new-production Sovtek 6N1P tubes for about \$12 each. Necessary re-tubing down the road won't break the bank.

#### Listening

The Gold Note features a similar sonic voice, whether enjoying a CD or using the DAC for streamed content. However, CD playback is where it truly excels. The sound is exceptionally immersive and it's easy to get swept up in the music rather than scrutinizing it.

The CD-1000 MkII digs out bass notes in a tight, defined, and concise way. Those who crave heavy bass emphasis may find the player's voicing a touch polite for their taste. Low frequency, dub-steppy elements heard in Billie Eilish's "you should see me in a crown" renders with ample punch, though. Listeners pairing the CD-1000 with preamps and amps that excel at low-frequency delivery may find the Gold Note an excellent match.

The Gold Note offers a beautiful midrange portrayal. Vocals seem to take a step toward the listener, exceeding the physical speaker placement. Similarly-impressive is the player's broad and deep soundstage. Instruments sometimes offer a surprise by appearing to wrap around the edges of the listening space.

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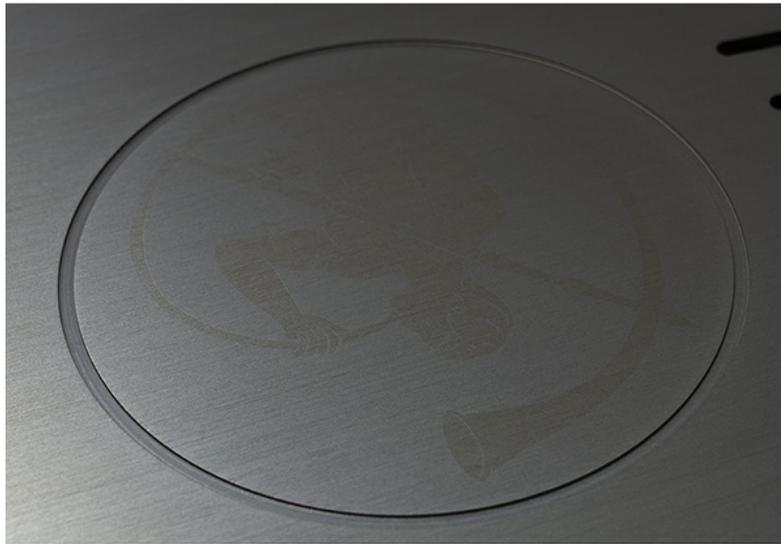
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On the top end, high-frequency information translates with oodles of detail. The player retrieves nuances that help frame the ambiance around vocalists and various instruments. It layers them in the soundstage deftly. However, that marvelous capability is a double-edged sword at times. When mated with similarly-voiced downstream components, the DAC can introduce a touch of stridency. For example, "Don't Know Why" by Norah Jones comes with a bit of hard edge during her vocal crescendos. For sonic comparison between the DAC and CD functionality, we played the same track using the CD-1000MkII's DAC only, and then the CD player. The Redbook CD playback sounded a little more rounded, even in comparison with a streamed 24-bit/192KHz native file.

I expect the power supply upgrades for the CD-1000 would enhance all the player's strengths and diminish the few quibbles. Even without the upgrades though, the Gold Note's voice is lovely and it's easy to get immersed in rummaging through old CDs to see what the CD-1000 can extract from them. Those seeking more detail and "life" in their stereo system's digital playback prowess may find the CD-1000 a great option.

#### Summing up

The Gold Note CD-100 MkII is an exceptional performer and a marvelous choice for those with an extensive CD collection. However, keep in mind that the player decodes streamed music too. Dividing that cost among the player and DAC capabilities justifies the future-proofed investment. Plus, Gold Note's various power supplies give a prospective owner an upgrade path. If this review whets your appetite for a new CD player, be sure to audition a CD-1000 MkII and see if it's the solution you've been seeking to complement your other system components.



**Gold Note CD1000 MkII CD Player and DAC**

MSRP: \$5,000

[www.goldnote.it](http://www.goldnote.it)

**PERIPHERALS**

**Digital Sources** Roon Nucleus, Simaudio MOON 780D DAC, Oppo BDP-103, Synology DiskStation 415 Play, Tidal and Qobuz streaming services.

**Amplification** Conrad-Johnson ART150

**Preamplification** Coffman Labs G1-B

**Speakers** GamuT RS3i

**Cables** Jena Labs

**Power** Torus AVR 15 Plus, RSA Mongoose, and Cardas power cords

**Accessories** ASC tube traps, Cathedral Sound Room Dampening Panels, Mapleshade Samson audio racks, Coffman Labs Equipment Footers

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