PRESS KIT BACKGROUNDER

Cortado Xe

Pro contact microphone with integrated phantom-powered preamp

Product Overview

The **Cortado Xe** is a professional contact microphone with a built-in phantom-powered preamp. The entire signal chain — piezo contact sensor, JFET preamplifier, and cable — is integrated into a single all-steel housing measuring 26mm in diameter and 11mm tall. Connect to any XLR input with 24–48V phantom power and it's ready to record or perform.

The Xe is designed for musicians, recording engineers, sound designers, and anyone who needs to capture vibration from a solid surface — acoustic instruments, percussion, industrial objects, architectural surfaces, or anything else that resonates.

> **One sentence:** The Cortado Xe is a balanced, phantom-powered contact microphone with a built-in JFET preamp, housed in a compact all-steel enclosure measuring 26mm across and 11mm tall.

The Story Behind the Xe

Zeppelin Design Labs has been building the Cortado MkIII since 2019 — a phantom-powered contact mic with onboard pad and high-pass filter controls, hand-matched JFET preamp, and a reputation for capturing acoustic instruments with unusual fidelity. The MkIII earned reviews from Sound On Sound, Tape Op, and Guitar Moderne, and found a following among acoustic instrumentalists, luthiers, and recording engineers.

The Xe started with a question: *what if the preamp lived inside the sensor itself?*

By integrating the preamp directly into the transducer housing and eliminating the separate chassis, the Xe achieves a dramatically smaller form factor while preserving the core Cortado characteristics — balanced XLR output, phantom power operation, and extended high-frequency response. The trade-off is deliberate: the Xe omits the MkIII's onboard pad and HPF controls, deferring those adjustments to the mixer or audio interface. The result is a simpler, more compact tool optimized for situations where size and simplicity matter most.

The all-steel housing was chosen primarily for durability — it's built to survive life on tour, in the studio, and in the field. As a side benefit, the ferrous steel is magnet-compatible, giving users an additional mounting option alongside the included putty and adhesive.

Technical Specifications

CORTADO XE SPECIFICATIONS	
Transducer type	Piezo contact sensor
Preamplifier	IC JFET, fixed bias, integrated
Output	Balanced XLR (male connector)
Power requirement	24–48V phantom power
Frequency response	40 Hz – 40 kHz (typical)
Housing material	All-steel, ferrous
Dimensions	26mm diameter × 11mm height
Cable	Integrated, permanently attached, 6 ft (1.8 m)
Connector	Male XLR
Mounting	Putty (included), adhesive, or magnet
In the box	Cortado Xe, carry pouch, mounting putty, Velcro cable tie, guitar pick, sticker
MSRP	$169.95 USD
SKU	PCXE
Warranty	1-year limited

Cortado Xe vs. Cortado MkIII

The Xe and MkIII are complementary products — they share the same design philosophy (balanced, phantom-powered contact mic with built-in preamp) but serve different use cases.

FEATURE	CORTADO XE	CORTADO MKIII
Form factor	Single integrated unit	Sensor + separate preamp chassis
Housing	All-steel, 26mm × 11mm	Galvanized chassis, sensor 36mm × 15mm
Preamp	Built-in, fixed bias	Matched JFET, adjustable bias
Onboard controls	None	Pad + high-pass filter

FEATURE	CORTADO XE	CORTADO MKIII
Magnet-mountable	Yes (ferrous housing)	Yes (ferrous sensor)
Output	Balanced XLR	Balanced XLR
Power	24–48V phantom	24–48V phantom
Freq. response	40 Hz – 40 kHz	23 Hz – 40 kHz
MSRP	$169.95	$159.95

> **Positioning:** The MkIII is for users who want controls at the microphone — pad for high-SPL sources, high-pass filter for rumble. The Xe is for users who want our most compact, simplest pro contact mic and are comfortable making those adjustments at the mixer or interface. Many users will own both.

Key Use Cases

Drums & Percussion

Mount on tom, snare, or kick shells to capture attack, shell resonance, and body tone with minimal bleed from cymbals and the rest of the kit. The low-profile 26mm sensor stays out of the drummer's way on stage and tucks cleanly under hoops in the studio. Use as spot mics on individual drums or blend with overheads and room mics for added punch and sustain. Magnet-mountable for fast repositioning between songs.

Acoustic Instruments

Acoustic guitar, mandolin, banjo, violin, viola, cello, ukulele, resonator, harp, piano soundboard. Mount directly to the body; the contact sensor captures the instrument's resonance rather than ambient sound, rejecting stage noise and feedback.

Sound Design & Foley

Capture the hidden sounds of everyday objects — metal, glass, wood, plastic. Used in film post-production, game audio, and experimental music.

Live Performance

Low-profile mount that stays put. Picks up far less airborne stage noise than an air mic. Balanced XLR output handles long cable runs to front-of-house without signal degradation. Particularly valuable for amplifying instruments that lack good built-in pickup options.

Studio Recording

Layer with a conventional air microphone for texture. The contact mic captures the body resonance while the air mic captures the room and projection — blending the two gives depth and detail that neither can achieve alone.

The extended HF response (to 40 kHz) captures textural detail that standard contact mics miss.

Suggested Review Angles

Depending on your audience, here are some review approaches that could be compelling:

- **"The simplest pro contact mic"** — Focus on the all-in-one form factor. No separate preamp, no batteries, no DI. Just plug in. Good for general audio/music audiences.
- **"Contact mic as acoustic guitar amplification"** — Compare to under-saddle pickups and soundhole pickups. The Xe offers a completely different tonal character. Demonstrate on a steel-string, a classical, and a resonator. Good for guitar publications.
- **"Instruments that don't have good pickup options"** — Banjo, mandolin, ukulele, kalimba, upright bass. The Xe fills a genuine gap. Good for acoustic instrument and folk music outlets.
- **"Xe vs. MkIII: two tools for different jobs"** — Side-by-side comparison. Same philosophy, different execution. When do you want controls at the mic vs. at the board? Good for pro audio and recording publications.
- **"Contact mic for creative recording"** — Stick it on unconventional surfaces. Metal pipes, wine glasses, drum shells, window panes. The 40 kHz response captures harmonics you wouldn't expect. Good for sound design, production, and experimental music channels.
- **"The under-$170 balanced contact mic"** — Price-performance story. Balanced XLR output and built-in preamp at a price point where most alternatives are passive (unbalanced, high-impedance, noisy). Good for budget-conscious and gear-comparison content.

Company Background

Zeppelin Design Labs is a small-batch pro audio manufacturer based in Naperville, Illinois. The company designs and builds microphones, amplifiers, and effects pedals — all designed in-house, assembled by hand, and tested individually before shipping.

The Cortado line of phantom-powered contact microphones has been the company's flagship product since the introduction of the MkIII. The Cortado has been reviewed by Sound On Sound, Tape Op, and Guitar Moderne, and is used by acoustic instrumentalists, recording engineers, and sound designers worldwide.

The Cortado Xe is the newest member of the Cortado family and the company's most compact professional microphone to date.

Media Assets

High-resolution product photos, the spec sheet, and the Zeppelin Design Labs logo are available to download from the press kit page: cortadomic.com/press-kit/cortado-xe/. Review units are available on request.

For media inquiries, review units, additional photos, or interview requests, contact:

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Press kit	cortadomic.com/press-kit/cortado-xe/

This document is intended for press and reviewers. Product specifications subject to change. October 2026.