

The Audiophile Apartment

Sound for Small Spaces

By Jeff Dorgay

Anniversary Party: The Harbeth P3ESR Anniversary Edition

The current “40th Anniversary” P3ESR is an interesting little speaker. First and foremost, because it sounds good. It’s not the “world’s best” or “world’s most loved” as the Harbeth website claims, because what is? It’s also intriguing, because I remember sitting in Harbeth’s Allen Shaw’s listening room, listening to him tell me that little things like capacitors and wire don’t matter and don’t sound different. Yet here we are with an anniversary edition speaker utilizing upgraded binding posts, special Harbeth upgraded wire and premium capacitors inside. Hmmmm.

All thumping on Mr. Shaw aside, these are fantastic little speakers, and thanks to a few tweaks are even better than they have ever been before. And they are an incredible value at \$2,890/pair. Should you share Mr. Shaw’s view on premium components, save yourself a few bucks and buy a standard pair for about \$750 less.

Between you and me, get the 40th anniversary pair – they are far less boxy and cloudy sounding than the standard model.

A small speaker can only move so much air, and like every other small monitor, there’s not much useable information below 70hz here. However, careful nearfield placement in a small room will mitigate this considerably. True to their BBC heritage, the little Harbeths do an incredible job in the midband, reproducing voices and acoustic instruments in a lifelike manner. And for that matter, better than a lot of more expensive speakers.



The Audiophile Apartment

Sound for Small Spaces

By Jeff Dorgay

Initial swaps between vintage LS3/5a, the current Graham Audio LS3/5a and the P3ESRs had me feeling the Harbeths a bit rolled off, but further comparison reveals that the Harbeth tweeter has slightly less horizontal dispersion, so they will just need to be optimized a bit more carefully when setting up.

If you think the Harbeths are wooly, you've them set up incorrectly.

Play with the rake angle a bit. A few degrees of tilt will change the perspective dramatically. To the better.

Once properly set up, the small Harbeths offer a sonic presentation that rivals my Quads in terms of soundstage dimension and midrange neutrality, though the ESLs get the edge in ultimate transparency and low level resolution. (as they should at nearly five times the price) Grooving on Paul Weller's lead vocal in the Style Council's "You're The Best Thing" is warm, deep and enticing, keeping Weller's voice locked in place, separate from the backing vocals and the instrumental play. Ditto for Japan's "Nightporter," and Shriekback's "Underwater Boys."

Bouncing through a long, totally 80s playlist of music that has normally been considered compressed and one dimensional, is a revelation through the small Harbeths. Duran Duran's "Reflex" fills the room, with layer upon layer of information, as does the Pogue's rendition of "Dirty Old Town." These tiny speakers have a big fun factor. Set up in my main listening room in a small, nearfield configuration, music without a ton of low frequency content is stunning and spacious. The level of tonal correctness and sheer amount of musical information that they do reveal is exceptional for the price.

Enjoy the Experience



PASS

Pass Laboratories
13395 New Airport Rd. Ste G., Auburn, CA 95602
(530) 878-5350 - www.passlabs.com

The Audiophile Apartment

Sound for Small Spaces

By Jerold O'Brien

Harbeth speakers have always been amplifier friendly, and the current P3 is no exception. As long as you have about 30 watts per channel on tap, you should be good.

More quality power on tap will offer more dynamic clarity with these speakers.

Running through a gamut of tube and solid-state amplification, the sheer resolving power of these speakers easily reveal the character of the wide range of amplifiers at my disposal.

Interestingly enough, my favorite amplifier with these speakers is the single-ended, solid state Sugden A21SE. This single ended class A design is a heavenly match for these speakers.

PrimaLuna's HP Integrated comes in a close second, and neither of these amplifiers will break the bank, should you want to build an entire system around them.



Optimized or Compromised?



With the modular OCTAVE HP 700 preamplifier, there is no trade-off!

With the OCTAVE **HP 700** tube preamplifier there is no sacrifice of personal customization to enjoy perfect sound quality. Distinguished by its powerful and airy sound, the **HP 700** also boasts the incredible flexibility of eight optional high-end input modules, allowing perfect customization to any system without a hint of audible compromise.

OCTAVE

MODERN CLASSIC



Crafted from the highest grade components



Audiophile tone control option



Perfectly optimized optional input modules

The Audiophile Apartment

Sound for Small Spaces

By Jeff Dorgay

Serial number
40THX346L

Details of this loudspeaker
recorded in our Master Lab



Hand made in England
www.harbeth.co.uk

Conclusions

Harbeth purists might find the thought of adding a subwoofer heresy, but why not? Again, because these are such resolving speakers, a boomy, one-note, budget sub will not provide the desired effect. As we still had a pair of REL Carbon subs here, moving one into the big listening room, right in the center of the speakers works perfectly. REL suggests corner loading for maximum effect, but the slightly diminished effect of being directly in the room makes mating with the Harbeths sheer perfection.

Considering how well these little speakers disappear in the room to begin with, giving them some seamless, low range grunt makes for a \$6,500 full range system that's tough to beat. Only when playing the loudest heavy rock at unreasonable levels do they show their limitations.

So, if you're looking for a great small pair of speakers that will unobtrusively coexist in a modest living room, the Harbeths certainly get my vote.

The P3ESR Anniversary Edition
\$2,890/pair

www.harbeth.co.uk