



AIRPODS PRO 2: SPATIAL AUDIO SENSATIONS

T3

SMARTER LIVING

FIRST LOOK

APPLE WATCH 8 & WATCH ULTRA



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SAMSUNG FOLD 4

Simply the finest foldable phone you can buy

TESTED

DELL XPS 15



Swift, stunning, long lasting

THE HOT NEW iPhone 14 PRO

Kiss the notch goodbye and say hello to its stunning, always-on screen



Heavenly HI-FI KIT

Warm and wired vs stress-free streaming

HIGH-TECH PROJECTORS

Why the time's right to bring cinema home

REVIEWED

DJI AVATA

Soar like an eagle with this 4K FPV drone

Smarter HOME SAVINGS

Essential smart home upgrades to help you beat your bills



ISSUE 339

Heavenly hi-fi kit

A good audio system is a joy forever, of course – but should it be wired or wireless? And where should your music come from?

Words: Simon Lucas Photography: Olly Curtis



Wired system

The everything-joined-up way

THE AMP

REGA ELICIT 5

To its established virtues of speed, detail and extraordinary sonic insight, Rega has added a high-resolution digital-to-analogue convertor and a couple of digital inputs to its Elicit integrated amplifier. The Elicit 5 is a brilliantly adaptable and convincing listen, able to turn its hand to any type of music – and it's now equipped to deal with any source of music you like, from turntables to laptops.

£1,995, rega.co.uk

THE TURNTABLE

PRO-JECT RPM 5 CARBON

What's better than a turntable that sounds every penny of the asking price? Where dynamism, integration, detail, rhythm management and all the other things that are so prized about the vinyl format shine through? A turntable that looks as good as it sounds, that's what. And with uncompromised engineering to accompany the visual drama, the RPM 5 Carbon has everything you need.

£1,199, project-audio.com

THE SPEAKER

BOWERS & WILKINS 705 SIGNATURE

The 705 was always a leading loudspeaker, and for the 'Signature' edition Bowers & Wilkins has basically put a beautifully built and finished rocket up an already deeply capable design. As far as scale, fidelity and straightforward musicality are concerned, there are very few credible rivals at the money – and with a new 700 series waiting in the wings, the 705 Signature is better value than ever.

£1,899, bowerswilkins.com

THE HEADPHONES

GRADO RS1X

Whenever talk turns to 'the best headphones you can buy', Grado is always part of the conversation. No, the RS1x aren't all that portable, and their open-backed configuration means they're best listened to when alone – but after that, all the news is good. The impression of space, the organisation of the soundstage, and the simple confidence of their presentation, is remarkable.

£799, gradolabs.com

WHY GO WIRED?

'Stability' isn't the most exciting word, we realise, but it's essential if you want to hear your favourite music as it is meant to sound – and the most obvious way of guaranteeing stability is to wire all of the components in your system together.

Basically you want to get the music from the source to your ears with as little degradation as possible. If your record player, say, or your network streamer, is hard-wired to your amplifier, which is in turn hard-wired to your loudspeakers or to your headphones, you're

giving yourself the best chance of getting all that complex audio information from the beginning of the chain to the end intact, with as little of it going astray or becoming muddled, as possible.

Because at every stage, your precious audio signal is being conspired against. Unless your cables are up to the task (generally allow 10% or so of your budget for all the interconnects you'll need), they can let information escape while it's in transit. Good cables allow all the analogue information to flow, rather than

disappear on the journey. And from outside, radio-frequency interference and the noise in your home's electrical supply (probably caused by things like computers and fridges) can affect the integrity of your signal path.

Get it right, though, and at point 'B' (your ears) you'll hear the most faithful representation of the music that originates at point 'A' (your source) possible – even if the journey from 'A' to 'B' is lengthy. And that's not something you can say with any confidence about the wireless alternative...



Wireless system

Sound without the spaghetti

THE SPEAKER

JBL 4305P

They look like almost any pair of high-end JBL speakers from the last few decades, but the 4305P feature a stack of amplification, numerous analogue and digital inputs, and wireless streaming smarts. This is all in addition to that wide-open, utterly faithful sound with which JBL is synonymous, of course. The makings of an entire hi-res audio system in two small loudspeakers – that's the 4305P.

£1,999, [jbl.com](https://www.jbl.com)

THE TURNTABLE

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO ALVA TT V2

Even if it was 'just' a record player, the Alva TT v2 would have plenty to recommend it – it's a smooth, robust and fluent listen, with plenty of detail to spare. But on top of this, Cambridge Audio has fitted a phono stage (for ultimate system compatibility) and wireless high-resolution streaming – so you only have to plug it into the mains to enjoy its many sonic charms.

£1,699, [cambridgeaudio.com](https://www.cambridgeaudio.com)

THE AUDIO PLAYER

FIIO M11 PLUS

Yes, your smartphone can do everything the Fiio M11 Plus can do when it comes to storing, streaming and playing music. But once you listen to the M11 Plus, you'll realise your smartphone is a pedalo and the Fiio is a speedboat. As a source of portable audio gratification, you can't do any better at anything like this money – the M11 Plus is a superb-sounding device.

£599, [fio.com](https://www.fio.com)

THE HEADPHONES

SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 4

The Momentum 4 sound excellent – muscular, delicate and always utterly musical. They cancel external noise almost entirely, all the better for you to enjoy the sound they make. Their control app is among the very best around, as are their touch-controls. They're designed and built by people who know exactly what they're doing. We could go on, but you've got the point by now...

£299, [sennheiser.com](https://www.sennheiser.com)

WHAT ABOUT WIRELESS?

The most obvious benefit of choosing wireless equipment means your system requires very few wires. Anything that's not battery-powered will require plugging into the mains, of course, but after that you're clutter-free. Choosing wireless equipment means your home audio system can be condensed into speakers with their own amplification (like the JBLs in our set-up), along with a wireless source (such as the Fiio M11 Plus), and you're good to go. About the only way it could be any

more convenient is if it chose music for you – but then again, if you subscribe to a music streaming service it almost certainly will.

And wireless audio is equally satisfying for portable listening. Making a wireless connection between your music player and your headphones leaves you unencumbered, rather than tethered, and makes for a far more relaxing on-the-move experience. And, of course, wireless connectivity means you can listen to headphones at home and still be

able to get up to fix a drink or what-have-you without having to pause your tunes.

Yes, it's fair to say that, on a pound-for-pound basis, a wired system is likely to outperform its wireless alternative. But advances in technology mean the gap is getting smaller all the time... so if you accept that every audio system is compromised to a lesser or greater extent, you'll almost certainly agree that the compromises in a wireless system are most definitely worth making.



SOURCES

MUSIC STREAMING SERVICES

Access to an enormous amount of music can be yours for free, as long as you don't mind periodically listening to ads. And if you're prepared to pay for a monthly subscription, not only do the ads disappear but the quality of the audio improves too – and services such as Qobuz and Tidal can offer high-resolution streams and downloads that are among the best, most satisfying ways of all to listen to your tunes. As far as listen-anywhere convenience goes, too, streaming services are untouchable.

NETWORK-ATTACHED STORAGE

Putting what is effectively a large quantity of memory onto your local network can bring a whole new dimension to your wireless listening experience. Big, hi-res audio files are, of course, quite memory-hungry – so it's better to keep them off your computer's hard drive as much as possible. And if you keep them on a NAS device, it's accessible from any UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) device on the same network – and a Roon subscription will allow you to amalgamate your NAS with your music streaming subscriptions too.

How much more convenient could it get?

VINYL

The Format That Will Not Die is almost 75 years old – an eternity in technology terms. And though it's had the last rites read on numerous occasions, both the tangible and the intangible benefits of vinyl as a music storage format means the lid is far from being nailed down just yet. Yes, it's bulky and yes, it's easily damaged and no, it doesn't store all that much music on a single disc. But a well-sorted vinyl-based audio system covers dynamism, detail, timing and rhythmic expression more thoroughly than any other.

COMPACT DISC

In the space of four decades, compact disc has gone from 'brave new world' to 'charmingly retro' – but there's life in the old digital dog yet. All the virtues of the format that so thrilled the world to begin with are still intact: the discs are small, hard-wearing and, if played on a sympathetic system, capable of brilliantly musical sound. For most consumers, compact disc was their first introduction to a digital audio future – and while it seems to be emerging from the doldrums, it's still an exceptionally affordable way to acquire physical copies of your favourite music.

INTERNET RADIO

There's always been a world of music out there, of course – it's just that now it's all available to everyone. Every nation, it seems, has numerous radio stations, all with their own special emphasis and specialisation – so no matter if you fancy checking out the reggae scene in France, the health of the Highlife genre in Trinidad or the downtempo electronica currently wowing the New York post-club hipsters, all you need is an internet radio receiver and reliable Wi-Fi. It's perfectly possible you'll never again listen to the same song twice.