

Boenicke W5

SPEAKERS LIKE NO OTHER? CHRIS KELLY LISTENS TO THESE UNUSUAL – AND VERY TINY – SHORT PATH, SOLID-WOOD STANDMOUNTERS FROM SWITZERLAND, AND FINDS LIVING WITH THEM IS AN ABSOLUTE JOY

I haven't met Sven Boenicke, who founded the eponymous Swiss company in 1998, but I would very much like to - he sounds like a very interesting man. Let me share with you the quote printed beside his portrait on the Boenicke website: "I confirm with my signature and by our reputation that it is our upright wish and goal to invent, design and manufacture the most honest products possible. That means that here, you do not get less than what meets the eye from the outside. But even much more." As a mission statement goes, that's a very bold declaration of intent.

Boenicke has taken a long hard look at loudspeaker design and manufacture, analysed what he considers good and not so good, and then made his own designs from scratch, creating a range of five models, all with solid wood enclosures.

Extensive investigation has shown Boenicke that solid wood resonates in a more natural way, significantly reducing cabinet colourations. The microscopic attention to every detail within any of the Boenicke loudspeakers, even down to the choice of glue, is rare these days, but is driven by the owner's single-minded determination that any product bearing his name is the very best that he can make it. The company also produces what could be termed exotic audio cables and electronics – outside the scope of this review, but I'd really love to hear how his uncompromising attitude to design and performance translates into those products.

Not often does unboxing equipment for review reduce me to laughter – more often than not it has the opposite effect as I wrestle some 30kg behemoth from its Styrofoam and cardboard sarcophagus. However, the pictures I'd seen of the Boenicke W5s hadn't prepared me for just how small they were in the flesh – just 10.4cm wide, 29.3cm tall and 23.1 cm deep. The next surprise was their mass: despite the small size they weigh a hefty 3.5kg each. And the third? Their handsome looks: the review pair were made from what Boenicke calls Pure Oak and looked lovely.

As you can see, the W5s look very different from most standmount loudspeakers. The front baffle slopes backwards, and towards the top sits a 75mm, 3" flared alloy cone Boenicke main driver for mid and treble coverage, crucially avoiding the usual mid/treble crossover. Boenicke dub this their "widebander". There is a first order high pass crossover filter, a single capacitor, paralleled by an RLC series network for balancing the frequency

response, and also attached to the positive terminal is a unique "spiral resonator". This is designed to 'improve harmonic frequency structures' and it is electrically connected in parallel.

On the side of the cabinet there is a long-throw 5 in bass driver, capable of a 18.5mm linear excursion. There is no electrical crossover to this bass unit but the drivers are tailored for an inherent low pass acoustical rolloff.

At the rear, a metal plate holds a pair of WBT binding posts and also what is termed an 'ambient' tweeter, designed to add a little 'air' to the overall acoustic, below which is a beautifully flared rectangular bass port, running almost the whole width of the back panel. The internal volume of the semi labyrinthine W5 is just 2.8L. The audiophile internal wiring is described as "orientation-optimised silk-wrapped high-frequency stranded Litz". Impedance is quoted as 4 Ohms, and the sensitivity is quite low at 83-86dB/watt/m, partially depending on frequency.

Purpose-built stands

Having unpacked and admired the loudspeakers, the next task was to assemble the purpose-built stands, which was very straightforward. The four-pronged feet are tipped with a felt pad at each tip – not a spike in sight – and the centre column is secured to the foot by a single screw, matched by one through the top plate. The loudspeaker is then attached to the top plate by four screws. Two Allen keys are provided for the different bolt sizes.

Once assembled, the W5s were positioned in the spot which seems to work best with stand mount loudspeakers in my room, and were toed-in towards my listening position. The cable in use at the time was Audioquest Robin Hood, and this was plugged into the WBT binding posts. The amplifier used throughout the review was my own Lyngdorf



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Specifications

Boenicke W5s

Type	Two-way standmount loudspeaker
Price	£5000/pr with matching lightweight stands
Drivers	12cm side-firing long-throw bass, reflex loaded; 75 mm flared alloy cone mid/high frequency; 'Ambience' high frequency on rear panel
Sensitivity	84dB/W/m
Impedance	5 ohms typical
Dimensions (HxWxD)	29.3x10.4x23.1cm

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TDAI3400. As is my habit for loudspeaker reviews, I ran this in its Bypass mode, circumventing the RoomPerfect correction software, while sources used for the review were my Linn Sondek LP12, with a Vertere Sabre moving magnet cartridge in its Ittok arm, plus a Vertere Phono-1. In addition, I used my Yamaha CD-S3000 SACD player, and the streamer built into the Lyngdorf.

Listening to the W5s

I started with one of my standard reference review tracks, *Tangled Up In Blue* on the Mobile Fidelity pressing of Bob Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks*. The acoustic guitars sounded "right" and presentation of the soundstage was vividly realistic – each instrument fixed in its place – and Dylan himself standing at the centre, ahead of his fellow musicians. There was almost no sense that the music was emanating from a pair of loudspeakers – the music seemed simply 'in the room'.

From then on, I ran through a whole gamut of music, and almost without exception I had the sense that I was not listening to hi fi but to actual musicians crowding into my living room to perform just for me. From 1950s jazz to modern pop, record followed record onto the turntable that day and only when I played some very heavy rock from Halestorm and Disturbed did I feel that too much was being asked of the W5s. If your musical diet is mostly of the heavy and metal rock variety, I suspect that you will be looking at other designs.

Switching to classical music, the W5s once again surprised me. The voices on my Linn Records SACD of Handel's *Messiah*, performed by the Dunedin Consort and Players directed by John Butt, were absolutely glorious. The sense of the recording venue (Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh) and every musician's place within it was uncannily realistic.

Even when listening to BBC Radio 4, I was immediately struck by how realistically the W5s present the spoken voice, which has long been regarded a strong point of BBC-derived loudspeaker designs such as my Harbeth P3ESRs, which are based on the LS3/5A design much revered in some circles. To say that the W5s were better is therefore a considerable compliment.

About a week into the review period, I ran Lyngdorf's RoomPerfect software through the W5s. With some loudspeakers this has made an audible improvement to the sound but with the W5s, the differences between the "corrected" sound and the sound in Bypass mode were negligible, which suggests to me that these are very accurate loudspeakers, which should work well in any small- to medium-sized listening room. That said, I would thoroughly recommend some initial experimentation with room placement.

One of the startling features of this tiny loudspeaker is the quality and depth of bass it can produce. A friend who stopped by asked me if my subwoofer was switched on – it wasn't – when we were listening to the 2020 Blue Note re-release of Paul Chambers' 1957 recording *Bass On Top*. The double bass sound, both bowed and plucked, was both musical and realistic, impressive coming from such a tiny enclosure. The rest of the excellent ensemble – piano, guitar, and drums – sounded incredibly realistic. The W5s really presented an almost holographic aural image of the band in the room with me. In fact throughout the W5s time in my system I did not find a single recording which flummoxed them. Even with our television sound routed through our two-channel system to the W5s, action movies were well represented.

We often speak of speakers 'disappearing': the diminutive W5s actually do pull off that elusive *trompe l'oreille*. Every time I sat down to listen, I was carried away by the music, not the hi-fi.

Conclusion

My time with the diminutive W5s has been an absolute joy. They really surprised me, and in a good way. A pair of enclosures each no bigger than a family box of cornflakes, mounted on what looks like a spindly stand but sounding this good, was one of the biggest surprises of my long involvement with the hi-fi hobby. I would love to have had other amplification on hand with which to try them, but paired with the Lyngdorf, which retails at a similar price point, they certainly did a terrific job. On the other hand, you could pair them with any of the better all-in-one amplifier/streamer devices that are in such current vogue and enjoy a taste of true high-end sound with a minimal box count.

I suspect that £5000 may prove to be a stumbling block for some potential purchasers: after all, there's no shortage of excellent options available, almost all of which look as if they give more for the money, and most of these would be floor standing, too. However, I think the build quality, attention to detail and above all the sound quality of the Boenicke W5s make them an outstanding proposition for the discerning audiophile. They also look lovely without dominating the room, which may make them easier to slip past a stern-eyed partner.

While I have learned from my experience of the Boenicke W5s that sometimes size doesn't matter, they've whetted my appetite to hear what the larger designs in the company's range can achieve. I was very intrigued by the use of the word "honest" in that quotation from Sven Boenicke, but I believe that with the W5s at least, he has more than fulfilled this promise. It's very easy to recommend these speakers whole-heartedly.