

# Design for life, sound of the cinema

**N**ot everyone has the space or inclination to deploy a set of full-size floorstanding speakers in their living room, and many folk don't like the look of box-shaped stand-mounting units. If you're in that category, a style-speaker system is the answer. Smaller and more design-led than conventional set-ups, these packages aim to blend in with the décor of your living room (you can even wall-mount them) while still providing the kind of picture-rattling punch and dynamic abilities you expect when you're watching a movie. We've assembled three packages here - two are previous Award winners, and one is an update of a package that won a whopping six Awards in as many years. This looks set to be a battle royale...

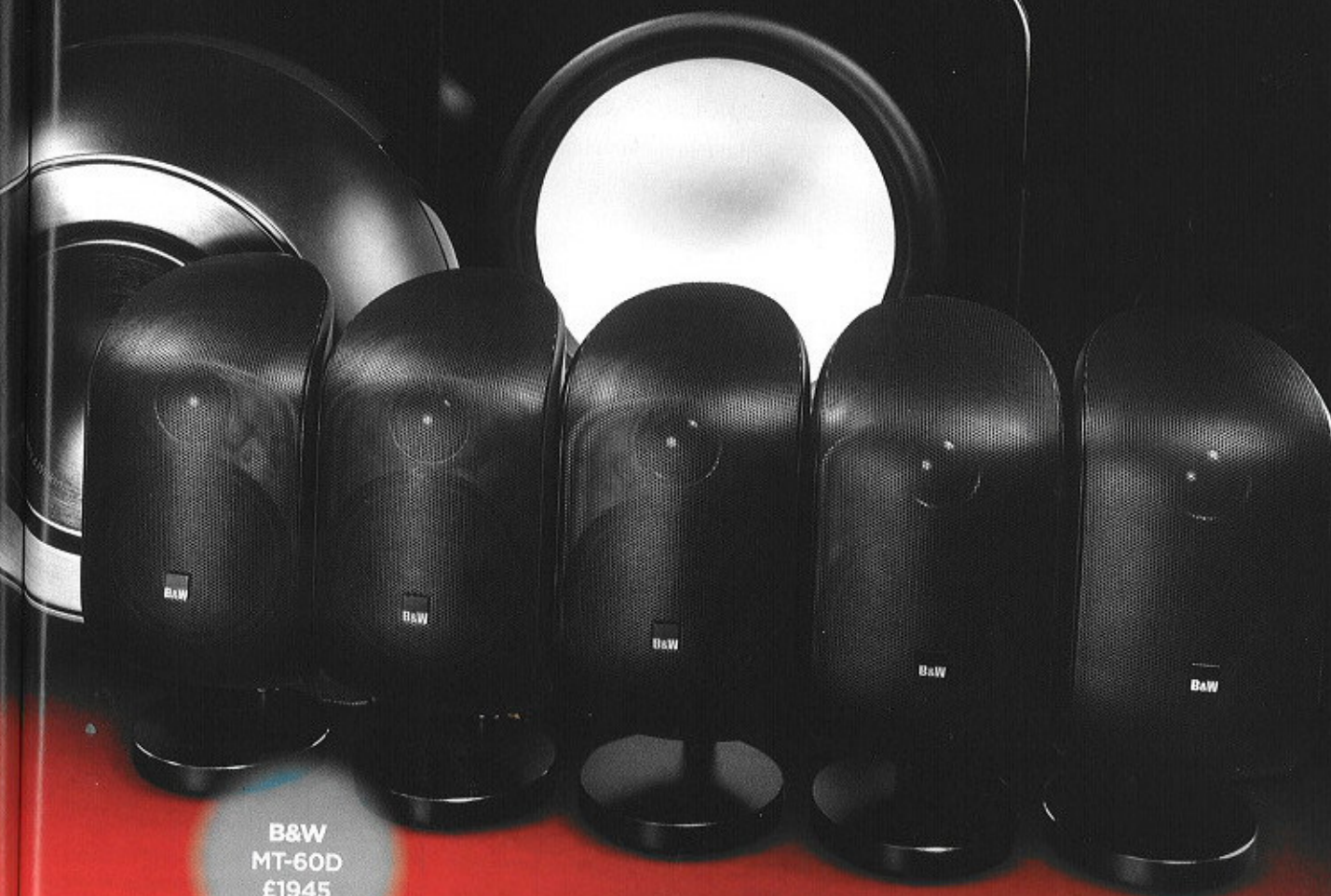
Dali  
Fazon 3 5.1  
£1725



Monitor Audio  
Apex 5.1  
£2400



B&W  
MT-60D  
£1945







### BEFORE YOU BUY

If you have a bright-sounding room and a partnering Pioneer amp, the B&Ws could be driven to hardness - so audition them first.

## B&W MT-60D

£1945 ★★★★★

**At first glance**, the MT-60D looks identical to the MT-30 package that's been an Awards staple in this magazine for years. Behind the grilles, though, a lot has changed. New drivers (tweeters based on B&W's high-end Nautilus designs and mid/bass units that use the same tech seen in the amazing PMIs), as well as a redesigned cable-management system all point to a system that should blow the socks off its predecessor. And there's the new PVID subwoofer, too...

### Subwoofer gets digital processing

That sub is as good a place to start as any. The original Award-winning PVI has been given the digital sound-processing treatment, hence the 'D' suffix. To that end, it offers a variety of EQ presets, accessible from its OLED display.

It still uses the same opposing drive-unit configuration, which cancels out unwanted vibrations and is intended to make for a cleaner, tighter sound. Tight, it certainly is. The sub does a great job of underpinning the work done by the satellites. Never obtrusive and

always controlled, the PVID gives the whole system a rock-solid foundation, integrating perfectly with the redesigned M-1 satellite speakers.

Those new mid/bass drivers are designed to go lower than before, meaning they integrate much more effectively with the subwoofer (and also function more convincingly in stereo mode). In practice, the M-1s deliver a bouncier, more detailed performance than their predecessors, with treble frequencies in particular exhibiting the kind of finesse you'd expect to pay a lot more money for. Midrange, similarly, is clear and articulate - and never swamped by the bass.

The biggest bangs that *The Dark Knight* has to offer won't shake the fillings out of your teeth - this is still a small-speakered style package, after all - but neither is the MT-60D a shrinking violet when it comes to scale or involvement. Sweeping effects are marshalled with a deft touch, more so than with the Monitor Audio or Dali packages on test here.

Switch to something more musical, and the performance is equally engaging. It's the PVID which steals the show here, keeping the kick-drums and bass guitars in Michael Jackson's *This Is It* Blu-ray well under control, and letting the M-1s handle the detail upstairs. The overall sound isn't quite as fluid as that delivered by the Dalis, but the M1s more than make up for that in enthusiasm.

That fleetness of foot is getting close to the line when it comes to brightness, though, especially at high volumes. So be careful when it comes to partnering kit. The package sounded grand with our Yamaha reference system; Pioneer kit pushed it a little over into harshness.

So, after a while away, B&W is back with a setup that had us grinning from ear to collective ear. Its competition here - Award-winners both - really do have their work cut out...

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Well integrated sound; dynamic and energetic; easy to set up; amazing subwoofer

**AGAINST** Can be fussy about partnering kit

**VERDICT** If you're looking for the best all-round style speaker package, this is it - B&W has done it yet again



### LIVING WITH IT

There are optional stands available for the Fazon package, but they're merely in 'OK' territory. Wall-mounting is better.

## Dali Fazon 3.5.1

£1725 ★★★★★

**Previous Fazon systems** had a tendency to knock on the door of greatness without quite being able to step through it. That changed, however, when this package graced our testing rooms last year, and ultimately it picked up the Award for Best Style Speaker Package £1200-£2000.

We still love the Dali. Its smart-looking speakers sum up for us what style systems are all about and, although they might be a royal pain to assemble, this needs to be done only once. After that, their mountings let you move them between walls, dedicated stands and aftermarket supports with ease.

Even before running in, we knew we'd be on to a good thing: it's a fluid, articulate and easygoing sound. And after a solid weekend of limbering up, these characteristics are even more apparent. Subtlety is no problem for this system; fine detail in voices and ambient sound-effects is treated with fine facility, and dialogue is never flat.

There's impressive scale for satellite speakers of this size, too, even in a

relatively large room. You don't get the out-and-out punch of the Monitor Audio system on p70, but then again, you don't have to accommodate that setup's bigger cabinets, either.

*The Dark Knight's* Batpod chase scene is a favourite tester for us at **What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision**, and the Fazon handles the complex effects steering without breaking a sweat. They send bullets whizzing around the surround-sound field without drawing too much attention to themselves, and they time well when it comes to percussive shotgun blasts.

### A sensitive and open quality

The package's musical sensitivity is the best on test here - no small achievement given the difference in price between it and the Monitor Audio package. There's a lovely open quality to the performance, with instruments placed precisely in the surround (or stereo, if you choose) field, and none of the at-times brittle treble served up by the Bowers & Wilkins speakers.

However, as we noted in our *First Test* back in November, the E-12F subwoofer isn't quite as precise as we might hope, especially given the abilities of the rest of the speakers. There's a bloated quality that, while consistent with the system's overall tonal character, sits at odds with its speed and accuracy. Given *Super 8's* trouser-flapping train-crash sequence to deal with, it lacks the last word in punch required to deliver those tight, concussive effects. The same is true with music; the quick-fire bass-drum kicks in *Black or White* from *This Is It* aren't given the surgical precision they benefit from with the B&W PVI.

That's a small criticism, though. The Dalis are still Award-winners, after all, and this likeable, easy-listening package should definitely be on your must-audition list. It deserves every one of its five stars here.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Fluid, open and airy sound; bags of detail and subtlety; excellent with music

**AGAINST** Bloated-sounding subwoofer lets the side down; fiddly to set up initially

**VERDICT** Subtlety and finesse in spades - it's just let down a touch by the subwoofer





#### LIVING WITH IT

The Apex's optional stands are pricey, but they do give you some neat built-in cable management to reduce floor clutter.

## Monitor Audio Apex 5.1

£2400 ★★★★★

The third package on test here is also a previous Award winner. Originally released in 2010, it picked up gongs for two years running thanks to its powerful, articulate sound.

And that sound is as strong now as it ever was. Set to work delivering the jaw-dropping train-wreck sequence at the beginning of *Super 8*, the system delivers each crash, thud and scream of tearing metal with a ferocity and enthusiasm that could well have new visitors to your living room wondering where you've hidden the big speakers.

### Big cabinets make for a big sound

Music, likewise, is treated with an even hand, if not the last word in sensitivity. The DVD of Pearl Jam's *Imagine in Cornice - Live in Italy* fairly motors along, with the Apex doing a great job of placing instruments on the stage around you in space. The extra cabinet volume that the Apex enjoys over its rivals here makes a lot of difference, of course; physically bigger cabinets means a bigger sound. But the overall impression

is one of big standmounters rather than bijou style speakers.

But for all that oomph, the Monitor Audio package still does a nice line in detail and articulation. Dialogue is clear, and while the satellites don't have the high-frequency finesse or fluidity of the Dalis, they're an eminently easy listen.

They keep the surround-sound field tightly controlled, although it's perhaps not as cohesive as it might be, with quite abrupt transmissions front to back. Integration is solid across the frequency range, although we felt that the AW-12 subwoofer, as with the Dali, was the weak link in an otherwise strong chain.

There's nothing wrong with it, *per se* - it delivers solid low-frequencies with plenty of punch and speed, and sits well with the satellites. It just doesn't have the agility of the excellent PVID.

This manifests itself in a slightly sluggish sound at times, especially with the quick-fire rat-tat-tat of a machine gun or bass-drum. It's far from a disappointment, but if you can try the system with the B&W sub, do so...

Our list of plus points doesn't end with the overall sound, either. The Apex package is superbly put together. There's a variety of options mounting, whether on a wall, existing stands or using Monitor Audio's dedicated ones, with their integrated cable-management (£125 each). You should be able to fit the package into any domestic setting.

### Superb all-round satellites

It's a luxurious proposition, this system. Of course, it doesn't come cheap - especially if you bring the optional speaker stands to the party - but its sonic character and build do elevate it above the competition. It's well worth every one of its five stars, too, and while it has the best all-round satellite speakers here, it's only that slightly pear-shaped bass performance which could hold it back from overall victory in this test.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Large-scale sound; no-nonsense looks; good integration; plenty of punch

**AGAINST** Pricey; subwoofer lacks the last word in agility

**VERDICT** Big movie sound combines with fine musical performance for a grin-inducing package



# TEST VERDICT

## THE WINNER

**B&W MT-60D**  
£1945 ★★★★★

There are no 'losers' here - each package in this test is terrific. But the improvements made to an already outstanding subwoofer make the B&W set-up the best of a fine bunch



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**TEST WINNER**

**This was never going to be an easy test to judge.** Not only are the Dali

and Monitor Audio packages both

already Award-winners in their own

right, but the Bowers & Wilkins

combination is an update to a system

that won prizes an amazing six years on

the trot, from 2004 to 2010.

Let's be clear from the off: you ought

to be extremely chuffed with any of

these systems. The Dali Fazon 3.1

package is fantastically fluid, easy-going

and detailed. Excellent with music and

more than competent with movie

soundtracks, not only does it look the

part, but it also delivers a sense of scale

that belies its diminutive dimensions.

Only a slightly less-than-articulate

performance from the subwoofer keeps

it from the top-spot on the podium here.

**The best satellites are the priceiest**

Monitor Audio's Apex system really

deserves to be your choice if you can

find the extra money required to buy it.

It has the best satellite speakers on test

here, without a doubt - and their larger

size, compared with this system's two

rivals here, means it can deliver more

power for testing movie scenes.

You need to consider that the package

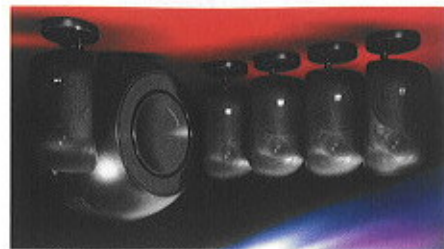
can get even more pricey if you were to

add the nice optional stands, but nevertheless, it delivers the best multichannel sound from its speakers. As with the Dali set up, though, it's let down by its subwoofer, which doesn't have the facility with leading edges that we'd really expect from a package costing this much. Which brings us on to our winner, B&W's MT-60D. Delivering a brilliantly integrated sound across the whole frequency range, it excels with movies

**The real winner in this test is the B&W subwoofer. We would urge you to try any of these packages with the PVID - it's really that good**

and music, and is able to turn its hand just as well to filling large rooms with blockbuster-bellowing as handling sensitive stereo music. And that brings us on to the real winner here: the PVID subwoofer. If you're in the market for any of these packages, we would urge you to audition them not only with their own sub, but also trying the PVID. You might well find that mixing and matching gives you the best of both worlds...

## Facts & figures



**Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D**  
£1945 ★★★★★

Satellite sensitivity 85dB/W/m  
400W • Satellite power 100W • Subwoofer power 8  
ohms • Sat impedance 8  
Subwoofer dimensions (hwd) 34 x 27 x 36cm



**Dali Fazon 3.1**  
£1725 ★★★★★

Satellite sensitivity 86dB/W/m • Sat impedance 6  
ohms • Satellite power 120W • Subwoofer power 220W  
Subwoofer dimensions (hwd) 37 x 34 x 38cm



**Monitor Audio Apex 5.1**  
£2400 ★★★★★

Satellite sensitivity 87dB/W/m • Sat impedance 8  
ohms • Satellite power 100W • Subwoofer power 500W  
Subwoofer dimensions (hwd) 34 x 34 x 41cm

For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit [whatifi.com](http://whatifi.com)



**TELEVISION**  
Toshiba 46V1863  
£1200 ★★★★★



**HOME CINEMA AMP**  
Yamaha RX-A1010  
£1000 ★★★★★



**BLU-RAY PLAYER**  
Denon DBP-2012UD  
£500 ★★★★★

Perfect partners for the B&W MT-60D

## SYSTEM BUILDER