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REVIEW: AUDIOENGINE P4 SPEAKERS & N22 AMPLIFIER

When we moved into new offices it became clear that it was also time to move beyond wires for our audio setup. Having things hanging down from the walls, having to plug devices in, having to worry about compatible charging docks, it all seemed so darn 20th Century. The quest was on for a really good wireless audio solution, so that's what we had on our minds when we attended the [2011 Consumer Electronics Show](#).

While Apple's AirPlay was getting good visibility at [CES](#) this year, the problem was that the gear we could find was more aimed at bedside tables and desks than audiophile-level multi-speaker devices that could be wall mounted and enjoyed by everyone.

When we bumped into [audioengine](#), however, things became interesting. They sell audiophile-level bookshelf speakers and a small amplifier that makes the tiniest of [iPods](#) sound like a fancy hi-fi system, while still having a remarkably small footprint: the [P4 speakers](#) are only 9" high by 5" wide and 6" deep, and the [N22 amplifier](#) is 7" x 3" x 5" deep. Tiny. With sound far beyond what you would expect.

And it's pretty darn sweet.



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That addressed the speaker question, but what about the wireless setup? The company also makes the [W1](#), a wireless audio adapter, but since we already had a spare [Airport Express](#) in the office and since that would then show up as an external speaker in any version of iTunes on a [Mac](#)

or smart device that supports AirTunes, that's what we opted for instead.

Unlike the booming bass of the modern generation of desktop speakers + subwoofers on the market, we also wanted to avoid having a separate speaker sitting on the floor somewhere: the goal was to have the entire audio setup neatly attached to the top of the wall, out of the way and essentially ignored unless music or other audio content was being played.

Unfortunately, when you read about wireless speaker systems, you typically don't notice that the devices need to be **plugged in** so you're trapped with the tyranny of power. Unless you do what we did and get an electrician to [install](#) a power outlet 6" from the ceiling on the wall in question (as you can kind of see in the [photo](#), below).

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Audioengine N22 amplifier, P2 speakers and Apple Airport Express

Notice the white gizmo with the little gleaming green light? That's the Airport Express. The N22 amp is on the right and one of the two speakers is immediately in front, mounted on a standard home theater satellite speaker mount (under \$10/unit at Amazon.com).

Having spent so many years with component audio systems, it was a bit retro to have bare wire speaker connections, but heavy-gauge wire is inexpensive enough and the end result is a pair of audiophile quality speakers pointing directly at the office conference table, a device that's always-on and always available to find from any device on the wireless [network](#)...



A variety of remote speaker options in Apple iTunes

Specswise, the N22 amp pushes out 80W peak, with a frequency response of 20Hz-22kHz with an SNR of >95dB and less than 50db of crosstalk. In a word, nice. And the P4 speakers? They can handle up to 125W per channel, with a frequency response of 58Hz-22kHz. They weigh 6lb each and have a 3/4" silk dome tweeter with neodymium magnets and a 4" Kevlar cone woofer, and come in black, white and carbonized bamboo.

The downside is that this is an expensive setup. You can score a refurb Airport Express for \$69 through the Apple Store, but the P4 speakers retail at \$249/pair and the N22 amplifier runs \$199. If you don't hire an electrician to rewire your office but still ceiling mount the speakers, those mounts run about \$20 for a pair, and you'll need a few bucks worth of heavy-gauge speaker wire to get everything connected. Total expenditure: \$540 or so for an audiophile quality wireless speaker system [installation](#).

Is it worth it? If you listen to music incessantly like we do, I'd say that it's well worth it to have a speaker system that you can really crank incredibly loud without distortion and that still gives a very warm, pleasant audio sound even at low volumes.

You can learn more about the audioengine line of audiophile devices [online](#): [Audioengine USA](#).

Disclaimer: Audioengine supplied us with all listed hardware for review purposes, but once we heard them, we knew we wanted to keep them and requested the ability to purchase the system from the company. Yes, we love it that much.

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