

Audioengine P4: The little \$249 speaker that could

by [Steve Guttenberg](#)

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The Audioengine P4 is a cheap speaker.

Correction, it's an audiophile speaker that sells for \$249 a pair. But that hasn't stopped it from getting raves from audiophiles who live with speakers that sell for a whole lot more.

I use [Audioengine A2](#) self-powered speakers (\$199 a pair) with my computer, so I thought I had a handle on what to expect from the P4.

I did not; it's a whole new ball game. First, the P4 is a "passive" speaker, so you need to hook it up to an amplifier or receiver. The A2 is an "active" self-powered design that can be connected to a computer or MP3 player via a headphone jack.

I started listening to the P4 with my computer, with the speakers hooked up to an old [Jolida hybrid tube/solid-state amplifier](#). The A2 is a sweet sounding little speaker, but the P4 was dramatically clearer, cleaner, and more vibrant. The P4 blows the A2 away--it's not even close.

At 9 inches tall by 5.5 inches wide by 6.5 inches deep, the P4 looks like a larger A2 (the A2 is 6 inches high by 4 inches wide by 5.25 inches deep). The P4 comes in satin-finished black or gloss white paint for \$249 a pair, or in bamboo for \$325 a pair. The wood isn't merely a veneer over medium-density fiberboard; no, the P4's cabinet is made out of solid bamboo, it's gorgeous!



The review P4 speaker sported a real, solid bamboo cabinet, wow! (Credit: Steve Guttenberg)

Audioengine offers a nifty tabletop stand, the DS1 (\$29 a pair), that cants the speaker back at an angle to project sounds up. The rubbery stands also isolate the speaker and prevent it from transmitting bass into your desk. Want to wall mount it? No problem, use the threaded inserts on the speaker's rear-end.

The P4's three-quarter inch silk dome tweeter and 4-inch Kevlar woofer appear to be of very high quality. Both drivers are made by Audioengine.



I also hooked up the P4s to my Onkyo TX-SR805 receiver and watched a few movies. They sounded nice. In a darkened room, the P4s disappeared and sounded a lot bigger than they really are. Dramas and comedies were well served, but the soundtrack on high impact films revealed the little speakers' dynamic range limitations; adding a subwoofer would help on that score. It was especially suited for late at night TV watching; with the volume turned down low, the P4 still had excellent detail and clarity.

The P4 really shined with playing music. I can imagine it'll be a hit with up and coming audiophiles. Its midrange is refined, naturally warm, yet articulate, giving the P4 the capability to make vocals sound human. Its stereo imaging is very good and spreads wider than the speakers' locations.

The P4's rear panel has sturdy, all-metal connectors.

(Credit: Steve Guttenberg)

The P4's bass may not be that deep, but what's there is of very high quality and without the boom and murky bloat that I hear from so many [iPod](#) speakers that sell for a lot more money than the P4. That means it will be easy to match the P4 with a decent subwoofer.

The P4's treble is refined, as long as you don't boost the volume too loud. The P4 will sound best in small rooms-- less than 250 square feet.

It's definitely a contender for the Audiophile's Speaker of the Year.

The P4, like all [Audioengine products](#), is sold direct on the company's [Web site](#), and it has 150 brick-and-mortar dealers in the U.S.



Steve Guttenberg is a frequent contributor to magazines and Web sites including Home Entertainment, Playback, and Ultimate AV. He is a member of the [CNET Blog Network](#), and is not an employee of CNET. [Disclosure](#).

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