

# Audioengine 5+

[http://review.s.cnet.com/separate-speakers/audioengine-5-white/4505-7869\\_7-35117205.html](http://review.s.cnet.com/separate-speakers/audioengine-5-white/4505-7869_7-35117205.html)

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I gave high marks to Audioengine's earlier PC speakers, the [Audioengine 5 series](#) (\$300 now, formerly \$350) and step-down [Audioengine 2 series](#) (\$200), because they really are quite impressive.

Now the company's replaced that 5 series, also referred to as the A5, with the 5+. While the new "plus" model leaves off one feature (built-in AC power output) and jacks up the list price (bringing it up to \$400), we're happy to report that these guys definitely sound better, once again delivering excellent performance and features for the money.

## Design

The key thing to note about Audioengine speakers is that they are bookshelf-style speakers masquerading as PC or "multimedia" speakers, as these things are apt to be labeled. But unlike classic bookshelf speakers, these Audioengine models are powered (via a standard AC plug); there's no need for a separate receiver or amplifier, so you can use them with any audio source. Think of them as an old-fashioned stereo, but without the head unit, as the connections are all on the back of the left speaker.

The larger 5+ series is more industrial-looking (read: less stylish) than the 2 series and appears to share some heritage with monitor speakers you'd find in a recording studio. They're available in either [black](#) or [white](#), as are the 2s. There's also a bamboo version of the 5+ series that costs \$469 and looks significantly swankier--it's really nice if you have the decor to go with it.

The Audioengine 5+ speakers look to be about 10 percent bigger than the earlier 5 series. While they're similarly sized, measuring 7 inches wide by 7.9 inches deep, the 5+ speakers come in at 10.75 inches tall, while the older model came in at 10 inches.

The other key specs haven't changed. The speakers have a 5-inch Kevlar woofer and a 20mm silk dome tweeter. Because the left speaker houses the amplifier (50 watts per channel), it's heavier than the right speaker. Unlike the 2s, which have ports on the front, the 5s have ports on the rear.



**The Audioengine 5+ speakers have a plain, understated look, and a substantial build.**

It's worth noting that both the 2 and 5+ series Audioengine speakers come nicely packaged, with cloth covers over the speakers and cables. The left and right speakers connect to each other with "real" speaker wire (included) and you also get an input cable that allows you to connect your PC, or anything else, to the 3.5mm aux input on the back of the left speaker. The use of standard cables means that--unlike some speakers with proprietary connections and cables--you can invest in custom-length cables that are as long or as short as you'd like.

One final design note: these guys have no speaker grilles, which can be an issue if you have small children or animals who might decide to poke at them and potentially damage the speaker.

**Features**

So what are the differences between the 5 and 5+ speakers? Well, Audioengine says that the 5+ series has a new thermal system for keeping the amplifier cool, and the designers also changed up the connectivity a bit.

Instead of an extra 3.5mm aux input on top of the left speaker along with a USB port for charging portable devices, that audio input is gone and the USB port has been moved to the back of the speaker. That's a good thing because it means you can hide whatever you're charging behind the speaker instead of having the USB cord sticking out of the top of the speaker.

To be clear, the USB port is only for power, not for reading audio files; it also doesn't allow pass-through syncing with PCs. But that combination of USB power plus audio input allows you to charge your iPod/iPhone with a USB cable while you're listening to your music. And though the cables make the 5+ series a bit less appealing to the eye than a standard iPod dock, the combo is far more universal in its compatibility: you can charge and play any USB-powered audio device, including pretty

much any smartphone or portable media player. Unlike some USB power sources, the 5+ series speakers also have enough power to juice up tablets--this worked just fine with an [iPad 2](#) and a [Kindle Fire](#).



**You get two inputs, a subwoofer output, a USB power port, and speaker wire connections to link to the other speaker.**

On the older 5 series, Audioengine integrated a full-on AC power jack into the back of the left speaker. The company touted the fact that you could plug an [Apple AirPort Express](#) directly into the outlet, turning the speakers into an iTunes streamer via Apple's [AirPlay](#) functionality. Of course, that outlet could also power any other audio source--anything from a [Sonos](#) or [Squeezebox](#) streamer to a CD player. But again, that outlet's gone now, though most people probably won't lament its loss too much.

To make up for not having the AC power jack, the speaker does have a second pair of composite (red/white) input jacks, cables included, as well as a set of outputs for connecting a subwoofer.

Note that you can't toggle between inputs; both are always active. That's either going to be a feature--say, if you want to listen to music from an iPod while being able to hear the bleeping and blooping from your PC--or a bug, in which you constantly need to mute one audio source while listening to the other, depending on your point of view.

The Audioengine 5 series did not come with a remote, but the 5+ series does include one, which controls volume, puts the speaker to sleep, and can mute it. The 5+ retains the volume control button on the front of the left speaker. Unlike with the 2 series, that volume knob doesn't double as the power switch; there's a separate power toggle on the back of the speaker. However, Audioengine has equipped the 5 and 5+ series with an autosleep power-save mode that kicks in after about 10 minutes

when no audio passes through the speakers. (With the 5 series, some people complained that the speakers make a sound when the power-save mode kicks in--and it can be fairly loud if you have your volume up high--which you may find annoying).

Also of note: though the Audioengine speakers aren't technically "certified for iPhone," they are magnetically shielded. We didn't experience any GSM interference from the iPhone (those annoying clicks and buzzes that can afflict nonshielded speakers), even when we left it directly on top.

Audioengine sells some accessories, including the [S8 subwoofer](#) (\$350) and the W3 wireless adapter (\$149, available in March). The subwoofer connects via the red/white RCA stereo outputs on the back of the left speaker. It would obviously allow you to get more bass and even richer sound, but the appeal of these speakers is that you can really do without the sub.

The W3 is a pair of two USB-powered adapters--a receiver for the A5+, and a transmitter for a source PC/Mac--that allows easy wireless streaming. Audioengine says that the W3 delivers 16-bit audio over the 2.4GHz band, and it will be able to transmit to up to three receivers simultaneously. It's also designed to reduce interference from other Wi-Fi devices on the same band.

If those supposed advantages aren't attractive to you, consider instead getting an AirPort Express or [Apple TV](#) for \$99, or the [Logitech Bluetooth Wireless Speaker Adapter](#), which is only \$40.

## Performance

When we reviewed the Audioengine 5 series speakers, we said it was difficult to quantify how much better they sounded than the Audioengine 2s, but they definitely "delivered bigger, richer sound with deep, tight bass, and excellent clarity--and they played very loud." With higher-end PC speakers you just get fuller, smoother sound that has that much more detail, and when you listen to either the 5 series or 5+ speakers, you start to hear stuff (such as individual instruments) in your music that you weren't aware was there. They easily best more-expensive iPod speakers out there, including those from [Bose](#) and [B&W](#), which in some cases retail for more.

In reviewing PC speakers, we like to throw an eclectic mix of music at them, as well as a couple of action movies and games, usually a first-person shooter or two. We also like to do a little jury testing, and for this review, as for the review of the 5 series, I pulled in Steve Guttenberg, who reviews home theater speakers for CNET and had previously praised the Audioengine 2s and the [Audioengine P4s](#) (unpowered, passive bookshelf speakers) in his [Audiophile blog](#).

For the music test we put the Audioengine 5 series next to the 5+ and compared their sound using lossless tracks stored on an iPod. Quite simply, the 5+ series sounded like bigger speakers with more expansive sound.

As I said, the actual size difference of the speakers is relatively small, but you can definitely hear a difference in sound quality. We're always a little concerned that when companies change a speaker design the sound can get worse (while the price magically goes up). But in this case you get a nice bump in performance moving from the 5 to the 5+ models. It's not huge a bump, but it's certainly noticeable.

## Conclusion

As I said in my review of the 5 series, this model will just seem too bulky to leave sitting on a desk. They truly are bookshelf speakers with a more industrial flair to them. However, despite the price bump, once again the bottom line here is that you're going to be hard-pressed to find a 2.0 system that sounds better for the money and has the 5+'s connectivity options.

Yes, we could quibble about there not being an integrated AC power outlet anymore, but the combination of the design improvements (USB port on back), feature tweaks (included remote), and

the speakers' exceptional sound makes the Audioengine 5+ speakers worthy of an Editors' Choice Award.