

Audioengine P4 Speakers and N22 Amp Review — The Gadgeteer

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For awhile now, I have been using (and loving) the [Audioengine A5](#) speakers. They are a pair of self-powered monsters. There is really no other way to describe them. Big and with killer volume, the A5s are one of the best bargains out there for computer speakers... for home use. I tried them out in my office and could not enjoy them simply because other humans work there. Rats. Later on, Audioengine decided to make a pair of passive (NOT self-powered) speakers – the AP4. These speakers were sized right between the A5 and the diminutive A2 speakers, the A5's smaller brother. However, the big difference is that since the AP4 speakers are passive, they will not work as computer speakers unless you have an amp.

Audioengine has come out with the N22, a desktop amp of decent power and convenience that – when combined with the AP4s – makes for a darn good combination. With the availability of self-powered speakers like the A5 and A2, why would anyone want the AP4 with or without the N22 amp? Well, if you are looking for just computer speakers, there is really no reason. But if you want a little more flexibility, then the AP4 speakers make a great set of bookshelf speakers, surround sound speakers and any other kind of use that regular, ol' passive speakers are good for. And paired with the N22 amp, your flexibility just multiplied. So, depending on your needs, you now have real choices.



Let's start with the N22 amplifier. This is one compact unit that – due to its vertical design – will not take up much room on your desktop. And the design could not be more minimalist. One large on/off/volume button, a small blue power light and a headphone port... that's it. There's not even an Audioengine logo on the



front. If you're an audio geek that gets off on buttons and settings, look elsewhere. However, in this simplicity, there's power, 22 watts of power per channel. And that space saving vertical design keeps things cooled down, which is important because amps can get pretty warm. And on your desktop right in front of you, that can be an issue. To help keep it cool, the N22 also goes into power saving mode when not being used. The volume knob is a little too simple because it has no markings. You can't tell if it's set to 11 or not. I would have preferred some small indicator.



The rear of the amp has all the connections you'll need. There's gold-plated speaker connections, RCA and miniplug audio-in sources (wiring included), powered USB port (charging only – no audio USB, unfortunately), and a multi-functional line-out that can be used with another amp, pre-amp, subwoofer or the AW1 wireless adapter which I'll explain later. Also included is standard grade speaker wiring for the AP4 speakers (which do NOT come with wiring). The N22 even comes in a cloth draw-string bag – classy.

Setup could not be any easier, just follow the included book. I should note here that the N22 will work with any 4-8 ohm-rated passive bookshelf speakers. If you have a pair not being used, the N22 can put them to good use.

Headphones really benefit from the included port. Using this port instead of the audio port on your PC/Mac will improve the sound. My Grado 325is headphones just sounded "bigger" plugged into the N22. Which they should because inside the N22, there is a Burr-Brown/TI OPA2134 headphone amp. So if



you have some power-hungry, large headphones, that can be a big money saver right there.



Now let's get to the fun part – the AP4 speakers. Like I said earlier, they are sized between the (huge) Audioengine A5 and (petite) A2 speakers. So if they sit on your desktop, they can take up a bit of room, especially combined with the N22. The AP4 comes in 3 flavors: Black (which matches the N22) , white and a more expensive solid bamboo wood, which Audioengine says have better acoustics. They are compatible with digital hybrid amps, stereo receivers, integrated amps, and tube amps... in other words, just about anything.





The speakers are naked in the front, no cloth cover. I prefer this look, but I know some don't. They are front-ported for a little more bass. I don't think that a subwoofer is needed, but if you are a bass-head, then you can always connect a sub to the N22. The rear of the AP4 speakers have gold-plated binding posts for secure connections. The tweeters are silk and the woofers are kevlar which seems to be the norm for higher quality speakers today. They're also shielded, so they won't make your monitor go psychedelic on you.

Since the N22 and AP4 are really made for each other, the sound is powerful, clean with no noticeable listening fatigue over hours of use.



While I was listening to the N22/AP4 combination, I was lucky enough to be able to mentally compare them to the A5 speakers I have. I'm not going to do a comparison, because I like each product to stand or fall on its own. However, one thing that I immediately noticed was that the A5s are much more powerful, both in watts (75 vs 22) and sound. The A5s will blow you out of your seat. The N22/AP4 won't.

But the N22/AP4 combination still has plenty of power and oomph to let you disappear into your music. The sound is clean and the bass is measured, if not overpowering (a good thing, I say). In fact, I listened to Santana's "Black Magic Woman" from the album "Abraxas" at FULL volume, turned to the max on the N22 (iTunes volume about 75% – normal for me). No distortion. None. Nada. Zippo.

I was listening to the Moody Blues remastered "On the Threshold of a Dream" album and when it got to the ending, "Have You Heard Pts. 1 and 2" and "The Voyage", I was sold. I just love this album and the AP4s allowed me to lose myself without any distractions about mids and highs and clarity, all that stuff... it didn't matter. It was just so effortless sounding.

Back down on earth, I sampled the Paloma Faith album, "Do You Want the Truth or Something Beautiful". There was a slight over-brightness to Faith's nasal-tinged vocal over a wonderful choral backing on the song, "New York." In this instance, I think it was the production, which only points out

the accuracy of the speakers.

The Beatles “Love” album has unbelievable production values and the AP4s exploit that to the max. “Eleanor Rigby” slips in and out of a ghostly, aural haze, but the song itself is crystal clear and sounds like it was recorded yesterday. It’s hard to image it was over 40 years ago. It’s that good.

What has become apparent is that the AP4 speakers will give you what you feed them. They are about as neutral as you could want with little to no colorization to the sound. About the only caveat would be a slightly weaker bass due to the small size of the speakers, but a sub-woofer connected to the N22 will instantly boost that.

Given a choice to use speakers solely with my computer, I would opt for the more powerful and less expensive A5 speakers – or A2, depending on budget. But if you need a high-performance headphone/earphone amp *and* flexibility in your speaker set up, the N22/AP4 combination is really hard to beat.

Note: Here’s where it can get cool. Audioengine doesn’t just make speakers. They make stuff that makes their speakers way more fun. You can attach the N22 (and AP4s) to the surround/rear ports on a home theater receiver using the Audioengine W1 wireless audio adapters (\$99) and get wireless surround sound. No more crawling through the attic or under your house. I will say here that I have not tried this myself as I personally don’t have the W1 adapter. But according to Audioengine’s Brady Bargaenquast, the kind of setup is perfect for the N22/AP4 combination.

Product Information

Price: AP4 Speakers: \$249 US; N22 Desktop Amp: \$199 US

Manufacturer: [Audioengine](#)

Retailer: [Audioengine](#)

Requirements:

- Passive AP4 speakers require amplifier.

Pros:

- AP4 speakers sound clean and neutral combined with the N22 amp.
- N22 amp has integrated headphone amp built in.
- Build quality is solid.
- Combination provides a lot of flexibility.

Cons:

- No USB audio on USB port.



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