

Review - Audioengine N22 and P4 Review | MacNN

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Audioengine is rare in the audiophile world as a Hong-Kong based boutique designer and manufacturer of hand-built speakers. The principals of the company have an extensive background in the professional end of the audio industry and have already applied their combined 36 years of know-how to some very impressive consumer audio products. We'll see if that work translates to its bookshelf (and computer-oriented) N22 amplifier and P4 speakers.

MacNN Rating:

★ Price: \$250 (P4 speakers), \$200 (N22 amp)

- Strong but not overwhelming bass.
- ★ •
- Well-rounded at all volumes.
- ★ •
- ★ • Solid build quality.
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- ★ • Understated look.
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- USB for charging digital devices.
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- High price.
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- Strictly average cabling.
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Amplifier design

The N22 is a compact, no-frills, stereo amplifier. The unit is designed to stand upright for cooling and ventilation purposes. The front of the N22 simply contains a volume button, a blue power LED, and a headphone jack. There are no logos or insignia anywhere on the black device, which gives it a very understated design aesthetic that we appreciate.

The back of the amplifier contains a port for attaching the external power supply, a set of audio inputs (one RCA and one eighth-inch jack), and a set of audio outputs as well as a USB port for charging your iPod or other suitably low-power devices. All of the audio ports on the N22 are gold-plated, as are the included RCA and eighth-inch audio cables; while the debate persists about gold plating's usefulness, it won't hurt here. The wiring included with the N22 is merely average in terms of quality, though. Many audio companies seem to be opting for high gauge, shielded cabling;

Audioengine opted to include standard gauge speaker wire and average quality cables, which won't detract from the experience but isn't as superficially reassuring. The variable line output on the back of this amplifier can be used to connect the N22 to another audio device or to a powered subwoofer.

From a technical standpoint, the N22 is rated at 22 watts RMS per channel with a total of 80 watts of peak power. From the standpoint of user-friendliness the N22 is a simple and elegant device; the volume button doubles as the power switch, and the N22 slips into a power-saving idle mode when music isn't playing.





Speaker design

Audioengine designed the P4 speakers to acoustically match the N22 amplifier. The P4s come in three color choices: black, white, and bamboo. The black and white versions are made from medium density fiber board, while the bamboo version is made from carbonized bamboo wood, not a veneered material like the other colors. The speakers are heavy and have a very solid feel to them, which should help avoid vibration tinting the sound.

The speakers have a simple design with a pair of gold-plated binding posts in the back and high density foam padding on the bottom to reduce vibration. The P4s are designed for either sitting on a shelf or desk or for wall or stand mounting thanks to the mounting hole on the bottom of each speaker.





The P4s have a front ported design with two drivers centered above the port. The tweeter is a silk dome tweeter and the woofers are made of Kevlar. Unusually, the design of both drivers is so solid that the cabinets don't accommodate speaker grills; AudioEngine says that they're simply not necessary. Both speakers are shielded, and the cabinets are built with both heavy duty sound dampening as well as structural bracing. Again, it's not something you'd always notice, but it can have a significant effect on the sound.

Sound quality and listening experience

The duo of the N22 and P4 can be summarized as powerful. The construction quality helps the sound, but it's the audio itself that matters. We were particularly impressed with the P4's ability to reproduce bass very well, even at high volumes; it's tight and deep without overwhelming the rest of the range. Most listeners expect bookshelf speakers to lack deep bass response without a dedicated (or large) subwoofer, but that's no problem with this pair. Electronic and urban music fans will find their home here.

Our testing for this duo ran a wide gambit of musical styles, and we didn't find the upper ranges overwhelmed by the low end. Regardless of what we played we were consistently impressed with ability of these AudioEngine products to produce a pleasing sound, even when it was at uncommon volumes. The sound is warm without being overdone, which is really what we'd hoped for in such an audio system.



Wrapping up

The N22 and P4 combination retails for \$450, sitting at \$250 for the speakers and \$200 for the amp (unless you opt for the bamboo speakers, which are priced at \$325). That's certainly not trivial, and if you're simply looking for a bass-heavy but quality system for a computer, you may want to consider [Logitech's Z623](#) or the venerable Klipsch ProMedia 2.1.

However, if you want a compact, dedicated amplifier and a pair of small, yet powerful, bookshelf speakers that can compete with some genuinely expensive audiophile-grade equipment, the N22 and P4 make a great team. Their build quality is fantastic, and the sound thankfully reflects what you see on the inside. If the price tag doesn't bother you, then you owe it to yourself to try out this setup. Many companies offer a 30-day guarantee, but here it's worth the opportunity to have a real taste of compact but strong audio.