

Audioengine P4 Speakers

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We borrowed the line above from Merle Haggard to let you know our torrid love affair with [B&W's MM-1](#) multimedia speakers has cooled. A stunning two-channel temptress has lured us into a new and equally passionate relationship. Call us fickle, but the ears want what the ears want; and these ears are lusting after Audioengine's Audioengine P4 passive speakers.

Yes, we said *passive* speakers. Most of the speakers that come through the Max PC Lab these days are self-powered. The P4s require an outboard amp to drive them. As luck would have it, Audioengine has also just released a slick new two-channel amp, the N22, which they sent along for our review. We tested both products, together and separately, but we'll focus on the speakers here. You can read our review of the amp [here](#).

Like many studio monitors, Audioengine's P4 speakers don't have grilles that might color the sound. But this lack of protection also leaves the drivers vulnerable to misadventure.



The P4s aren't nearly as flashy as the MM-1s. Where B&W uses copious amounts of aluminum trim and wraps the entire cabinet in stretchy fabric, Audioengine builds their cabinets out of little more than medium-density fiberboard and satin-black paint (the speakers are also available in a high-gloss white finish or in solid carbonized bamboo cabinets for the environmentally conscious—bamboo is considered a renewable resource).

But that MDF is 3/4-inch thick—a much beefier material than you'd expect from speakers this size. The P4s are considerably smaller than Audioengine's self-powered A5 speakers (you can read our review [here](#)), but they dwarf the MM-1s in both dimensions and mass: the P4s measure 11.5 inches high, 7.5 inches wide, 9.5 inches deep and weigh 3.55 pounds each. The MM-1s measure 6.7 inches high, 3.9 inches wide and deep, and weigh just 1.87 pounds.) Two 1/4-inch threaded inserts on the back and one on the bottom of each cabinet provide plenty of mounting options.

As with its larger speakers, Audioengine fabricates the P4's woofers from super-strong Kevlar (four-inch cones in this model) and deploys 3/4-inch silk dome tweeters to handle the higher frequencies. A slit vent spans the lower face of each cabinet. You can use just about length of speaker cable you want to connect the speakers to the amplifier; gold-plated five-way binding posts on the back of each cabinet accommodate bare wire, spade lugs, pins, banana plugs, or dual banana plugs.



Audioengine provides five-way binding posts to give you plenty of options for connecting the P4s to your favorite amp.

We drove the speakers with two different amplifiers: Audioengine's new N22 Class AB amplifier and our old standby, TBI's [Millenia MG3](#) Class D amp. The manufacturer indicates the speakers can handle amps rated from 10- to 125 watts per channel. We listened to a broad swath of music, ranging from African pop (*In a Town Called Addis*, from Dub Colossus), to classical (Mozart's *Requiem*, recorded by Colin Davis and the London Symphony Orchestra), to retro vocal jazz (*Dominoes*, from Julianna Raye), and avante-garde jazz (*Black & White Sessions*, from Portico Quartet). Each album had been encoded in FLAC with 24-bit resolution at a 48kHz sampling rate and acquired from [B&W's Society of Sound](#) subscription music service.

The P4s delivered superb performances with every piece of music we asked them to reproduce, providing exquisite fidelity, impeccable definition, and a broad sound stage. Although the woofers are a full inch larger than those in B&W's MM-1s, their claimed low-end frequency response is nearly the same: 58Hz versus the MM-1s' 57Hz. As with the MM-1s, we felt the P4s delivered plenty of beef; but since the latter speakers are passive, you could easily pair them with a subwoofer if you crave more low end (provided your amp can accommodate the third speaker, of course).



Rubber pads isolate the speakers from your desktop, but there's a threaded socket there if you'd prefer to mount them.

Despite what we said at the top of this review, we're not kicking B&W's MM-1 powered speakers to the curb. The MM-1s knocked our socks off, and they still sound amazing. They deliver more features, too, including a remote that can manage both the volume and the media player software on your computer. And they boast an integrated DAC that can take a digital audio straight from your PC's USB port. The grilles covering their drivers also render them more practical, especially if you have kids around (we once lost an exposed tweeter to a two-year-old's inquisitive index finger).

The \$250 P4s consume a lot more of our precious desk space, require a separate amplifier, and leave their drivers exposed and vulnerable. But they appeal to the audio purist in us, and we can push them a lot harder than the MM-1s. Stepping into the tabloid world for just a moment, if we were Jesse James, the MM-1s would be our immaculate Sandra Bullock and the P4s would be our tramp-stamped Michelle McGee. Each appeals to different sides of our nature, but we don't want to be married to either.

