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## Audioengine's HD6 bring affordable audio to real people

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**Dear John.** A little while back, my friend Michelle emailed me from her new Brooklyn home:

*"Finally sorted my new apartment here in Bed-Stuy and I need your advice: I'm looking for a simple hifi setup. Nothing too fancy and certainly nothing too expensive either. My budget is \$1000 but I'd rather not go that high if I don't have to.*



*I know you usually deal with more expensive equipment but you probably already know that isn't me at all. I want an amplifier and speakers that'll let me play music from an iPhone (via Bluetooth for when my friends stop by) and an Apple TV. Do I need a DAC?. Oh – I might get a turntable down the line. Whatever you recommend will need to be compatible with that too.*

*Attached are photos of the apartment as it looks now – a lot nicer than when you saw it in May (right?) – so speakers that fit with the lounge room's aesthetic are preferable."*

That final sentence, along with the photos, stopped my previous suggestion (NAD D 3020 amplifier driving Pioneer SP-BS22-LR passives) dead in its tracks. Sourcing loudspeaker cable might be second nature to die-hard audiophiles but not newcomers like Michelle. Besides, the aesthetics of the NAD and Pioneers lack feminine sensitivities.

Like many mainstream consumers, our Brooklyn-based newcomer cares less for the how and

the why and more for the what: “What does it look like?”; “What can I do with it?”; “What’s the sound quality like?”. Talking to her on the phone by way of follow up, Michelle wants something that “just works, looks good, sounds good”.

Enter Audioengine, a company whose laser-guided focus on affordable audio sees them celebrating ten years in the business this very month. Inking that milestone comes formal announcement of their new flagship product: the HD6 loudspeaker, US\$749/pair.

A departure from Audioengine’s previously strong emphasis on clean lines and bold colours, the HD6 are available in satin black whilst my pair arrived in **cherry** but for Michelle’s lounge room we might opt for **walnut**. Each of the latter real-wood veneers come at no additional cost. Magnetically attachable grilles further one’s ability to customise these loudspeakers’ appearance. I prefer ‘em naked.

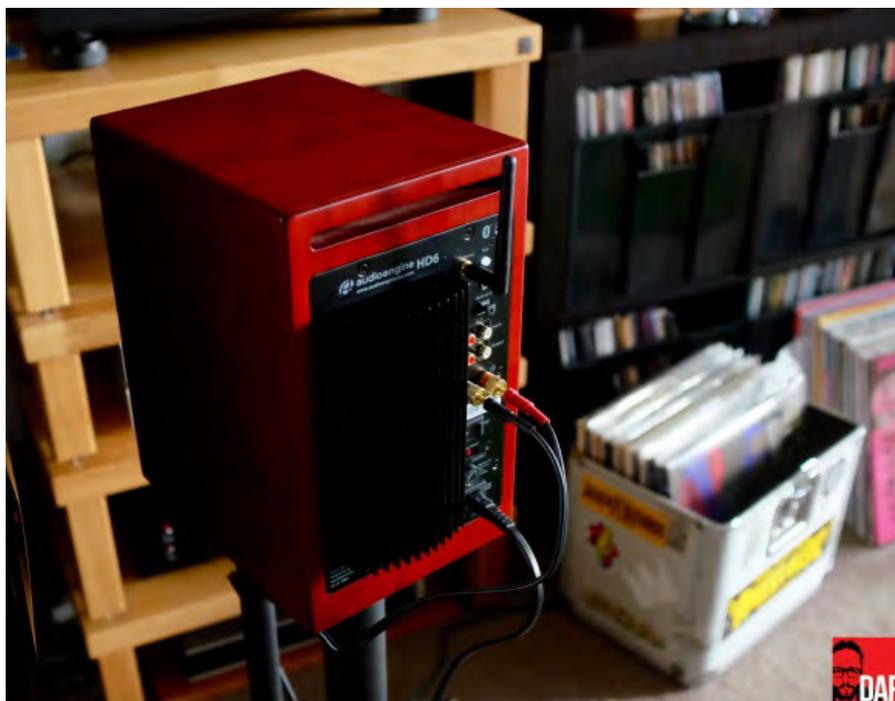


On looks, these Audioengine’s certainly earn the manufacturer’s claimed status of ‘Premium’. Fit and finish is as good as – if not better than – any passive you’ll find at your local specialist hifi emporium. Think Krix or ProAc.

There’s no need for an outboard amplifier here. Like the A5+ before them, these Audioengines are powered from within. Audiophiles with (snobbish) allergy to Class D will be pleased to learn that the HD6’s board run in Class A/B mode, hence the finned heatsink on the rear of the left box.

Setup is a cinch. Connected to right speaker with the (supplied) 4m banana-plug-terminated speaker cable, the left speaker does all the work – amplification, volume control, input management and source selection via super-sleek aluminium wand – and is therefore the only speaker to see mains power hook-up.

Copacetic aesthetics, set-up and tech talk out of the way, how do the HD6 suit our would-be newcomer on application? Audioengine have redeployed the circuitry from their own D2 DAC (here shorn of its USB input) in the left hand speaker. The aerial points to aptX Bluetooth connectivity which in turn puts smart device streaming (Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora etc.) at the top of the agenda.



It isn't just Bluetooth that rules outside of the audiophile niche. Gaming consoles, media streamers and TVs tells us that Toslink is the mainstream's industry standard for digital audio connectivity. Any product coming to market with mainstream aspirations but without Toslink will see its appeal breadth stunted (at best) or doomed to failure (at worst).

Audioengine are hep to this thinking.

With their HD6 fully Toslink-compliant, our New Yorker can hook in her 3rd generation Apple TV (US\$99) should Airplay streaming be required. It lends New Order's *Low Life* smoother-sounding cymbals and better textured synth lines than Bluetooth alone, especially if/when Tidal Hifi is engaged; unlikely for Michelle at this stage but crossing the entry-level threshold with audio gear tends to drive the desire for more. The HD6 land with a complimentary 90-day Tidal Hifi subscription so that Audioengine customers can find out for themselves.

Readers should be disabused of the notion that the HD6 are solely for desktop use. Aluminium-framed 5.5" mid/bass drivers accommodate proper room drive in small- to medium-sizes spaces. [We witnessed as much at this year's RMAF](#) and back in Australia I find the newer model more capable with low-end gravitas and crisper up top than Audioengine's previous TOTL model, the A5+, and noway near as pendulous with bass delivery as the [Vanatoo Transparent One](#).

Michelle's Bed-Stuy lounge room looks as if it might offer Goldilocks dimensions to the HD6.



According to the press release, the HD6's all-new silk-dome tweeter promises "smoother, more extended highs and incredible imaging".

In my own listening tests I noted nothing to counter this assertion. The HD6's presentation is self-assured with top end detail and the artificial mid-bass hump, as favoured by some designers to rev up the suggestion of bass, is mercifully absent. Both qualities feed neatly into the HD6's talents with creating a deep and well-specified image on the desktop.

Michelle might not care for such considerations but she'll certainly know it when the illusory presence of Future Islands' Samuel T. Herring materialises in her lounge room, even if the Audioengines are positioned on a sideboard or table.

Moreover, our New Yorker will likely find the HD6 a superb articulator of the human voice when deployed on movie night. I know I did.

That said, the HD6 don't have the last ounce of refinement that can be extracted from the Andrew Jones-designed Pioneers. In the context of the HD6's asking price and feature set, Convenient connectivity and lower box count matter more to first timers.

For bringing a turntable into play, two analogue inputs can be found on the rear of the left loudspeaker: a pair of RCAs and a 3.5mm socket (for which Audioengine thoughtfully supply a connection cable).



Hooking in a Pioneer PLX-1000 turntable fitted with a Dynavector 10x5 cartridge (as I did) might be too rich for Michelle's wallet but it really shows what the little Audioengines are capable of on the vinyl front (end). With plenty of tweeter sizzle electrifying Neil Young & Crazy Horse's *Live Rust*, the HD6 have enough pizzazz to bring even the most micro-dynamically restrained entry-level turntable to life. Here's looking at you Pro-Ject Debut Carbon.

However, of uppermost importance isn't how the flagship Audioengine stack up in the audiophile world but the potential to move house-bound listeners from the world of UE Booms and Beats Pills to one of proper stereophony and to do so without the end user, in this case our Michelle, taking a hit to convenience (Bluetooth, Toslink) and/or aesthetics.

The HD6 is a retro-styled system-in-a-box that just works...and one that sounds as good as it looks. It also reinforces this commentator's **prior assertion** that the future of high(ish)-end audio, especially at the entry-level, rests on the shoulders of those who would push the envelope with active speaker solutions.

And if Michelle circumvents Audioengine's reseller network by purchasing direct from the manufacturer's website she can avail herself of the HD6's 30-day home trial. You cannot reasonably expect more for your money.

Further information: [Audioengine](#)