

O/Baby – A New Loudspeaker from DeVore Fidelity

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Words by Rafe Arnott, photos courtesy of John DeVore. Image above: A pre-production prototype pair of O/Baby with stands at the DeVore Fidelity factory in Brooklyn, New York.

Twenty years after raising eyebrows with a svelte, two-way floorstanding loudspeaker design called the *Gibbon Eight*, John DeVore is back at it with a petit standmount playfully named the *O/Baby*. Not that he's been quiet in the intervening two decades. **DeVore Fidelity** has brought to market some of the most critically acclaimed and sought after speaker designs available for less than \$20,000 USD in the *Orangutan* and *Gibbon* lines. Although his newly released *O/Reference* four-box system tips the scales at more than \$80,000 USD, the *O/Baby* will come in at under \$5,000 USD, a price point that should please even the most high-waisted audiophile.

Sound pressure waves are forced to ride electric currents before release from their electron confinement through loudspeakers, and all that stands between this signal and your ears is whatever set of transducers you paid for. Smart money gets behind companies offering handmade, small-batch speaker designs by engineers who love music, of which DeVore is a great example. For those not in the know, DeVore Fidelity still makes every speaker by hand in their modest 19th-century digs at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York City.

Having previously reviewed DeVore's *Gibbon X*, *O/93* and *O/96* during the last several years I can express heartfelt admiration for his work based solely on the merit of his designs. So when I first heard about the *O/Baby* through social media, I thought it was a Photoshop lark. A miniature *O/96*?

Far too audacious to be legitimate, but a couple of emails later and I had the truth of it: The O/Baby was real and is on track for initial production before the end of 2021. The following is an edited transcription of a Zoom call I had with DeVore from his factory in New York last week.

Resistor Mag: Where did the idea for the O/Baby come from?

John DeVore: "The idea is old, it's been around since I first announced the price of the O/96. All my dealers and customers at the time started saying "Oh, you have to make a small one, you have to make a cheap one." I always knew the O/96 was going to be the middle model of the range, so the O/93 became the less expensive one.

"Before the '93 came out, we were playing with smaller drivers and none of them did the 'O' thing the way that I wanted, so the '93 ended up being another 10-inch two-way, and then projects went on to 'above' the '96. But I never lost the desire to come out with something that was legitimately more compact."

Resistor Mag: What about the driver development?

John DeVore: "SEAS and I got into a cycle going back-and-forth designing prototype drivers ... there was the initial run of prototypes for the original '96, then the '93, and the '93 incorporated a bunch of eight-inch driver options that weren't good enough to go with, but they were there, there was Alnico experiments, and then the O/20 bronze. It was this constant ongoing thing. So almost two years ago I came up with a framework around all the designs we'd be doing for the past 20 years.

"I ended up ordering an array of three eight-inch, and three 6.5-inch drivers all based on that original Orangutan recipe, same type of craft paper, same type of motor structure, same kind of ideas behind keeping the impedance smooth and relatively high."

Resistor Mag: What parameters determined the final driver choice?

John DeVore: "The way the [cabinet] math worked out for the 6.5 inch drivers, it became this perfect downscaled '96 driver."

Resistor Mag: You're running a 0.75-inch tweeter on the O/Baby?



Photo above: Some of the different 6.5-inch driver choices DeVore explored with Norwegian speaker manufacturer SEAS.

John DeVore: “Yeah, so another way to utilize designs that had already been developed, in order to make the super tweeter for the O/Reference... in order to get VIFA (Danish soft-dome tweeter manufacturer), to make the dome, the coil, the magnet – basically the moving part of it to my spec – which is different form anything they normally offer, I had to buy 1,000 of them. So that was a big motivation to use them for the core of the O/Baby.” *(DeVore is handling very limited batches of bronze casting for the chassis, and metal parts machining for the tweeter assemblies on the O/Reference)*

"The O/Baby does a great vanishing trick, they've got the room dynamic of an O/93 or an O/96..."

- John DeVore



Photo above: The O/Baby features a repurposed O/Reference super tweeter which DeVore created a new horn profile for within the speaker's front baffle – directly mounting the driver to the rear of the baffle and doing away with chassis requirements altogether. Retail units will be finished much further than the prototype pictured.

Resistor Mag: Did that super tweeter require modifications on your part to work within the O/Baby parameters?

John DeVore: “I had to completely redesign it because it’s not [being implemented as] a super tweeter. I have to have the right response below 20kHz, whereas with the super tweeter I don’t care what it does below 20kHz because it’s filtered out. So I basically went through and designed a new horn profile that I could reproduce within the baffle itself. So this tweeter, I don’t have to design a chassis for it, it mounts behind the front baffle, and the baffle becomes a horn-loaded front.”

Resistor Mag: So all this repurposing of existing components must have affected the bottom line.

John DeVore: “The fact it all came together in a way that allowed me to use stuff I’d already invested in, it drives down the price, so I’ll be able to put out in the market at a much more

aggressive price than something like the '93. And it's an adorable piece. I'm actually going to offer it in two form factors; the O/Baby and the *Micr/O*, which is going to be the same crossover and drivers, but housed in a sealed 11-inch cube."

Resistor Mag: So, a bookshelf model?

John DeVore: "You put a pair of them in a record shelf, they're flush on the shelf, and that's it – you're done. They don't take up any floor space."

Resistor Mag: So an offset tweeter in the corner of the square front baffle then?

John DeVore: "To fit the drivers, yeah, they'll be offset in the corners. It gives us a neater package."



Photo above; John DeVore in the listening room of his Brooklyn factory with an O/Reference set.

Resistor Mag: What was the inspiration for a small cube loudspeaker?

**At this point DeVore related how the burn-in rack for drivers which is located on the factory floor had become an area of contention for employees, one in particular came to him and personally voiced concerns.*

John DeVore: "We have *NPR* or *Qobuz* playing through these drivers on a big rack for burn-in, so if it's just a bunch of O/96 drivers it can sound aggressive because they're not in cabinets or boxes. It can get phase-y and squawky. So this employee, she was like, "Alright John, I have a complaint... I work at one of the most famous speaker companies in the world and sound out in the factory sucks." I thought it was a good point, and couldn't argue with that, so I built a little pair of cubes to fit on the burn-in rack and different drivers would go into those cubes.

"That's what got me thinking, because some of the combos sounded pretty good, and I ran the numbers and thought the 6.5-inch drivers would make a sweet vented box, and that's where the

O/Baby came back into the picture with the driver prototypes. The O/Baby was the second version, the cube was actually the original idea – totally ass backwards.”

Resistor Mag: Is the O/Baby rear ported?

John DeVore: “On the O/Baby it’s rear ported on the micro cubes it’s sealed.”

Resistor Mag: The O/Baby needs stands or risers for placement obviously. Talk to me about the thinking there. Are stands included?

John DeVore: “The stands are significantly taller than the ’96, they are 12-inches. Originally we had reproductions of the O/96 stands – straight legs – but they looked awkward and adolescent, so we did these with thinner legs and the taper for rigidity and to break up the silhouette. I think they look adorable. They’re going to be sold without stands to keep the price down. You can do whatever you want with them. If you want to find an inexpensive stand on Etsy or put them up on cinder blocks like I had my speakers in college, go for it.” (DeVore said stands will probably retail for more than \$500 USD).

Resistor Mag: How will the retail units be finished? Will there be colour options?

John DeVore: “They’ll be in the Orangutan style; dark grey cabinet with one standard finish for the front face of the plywood baffle. I’ll be able to do custom veneers on the plywood just like I do on the other O models. And the stand will probably be a matching grey to go with the cabinet – I don’t know. We’re still figuring cosmetics out.”

Resistor Mag: Are they bi-wired or single wired?

John DeVore: “All my stuff is single wired, they’re all star grounded, so they have to be single wired.”

Resistor Mag: Are you able to talk price point? When will they be available?

John DeVore: “It looks like they will be under \$5,000 USD without the stands, no idea on the cubes yet. Definitely less expensive. Timeline... I want to show what looks like a production pair at [Rocky Mountain Audio Festival](#) in October this year, and hopefully start taking orders by the end of the year.”