

Audeze iSine 10 Headphones

Steve Guttenberg | Apr 11, 2017



PRICE \$399

AT A GLANCE

Plus

- High-resolution sound
- Planar magnetic drivers
- Comes with Apple Lightning and standard cables

Minus

- Little or no isolation from external noise



THE VERDICT

The Audeze iSine 10's sound crushes the competition—it's more dynamically alive, more spacious, and more transparent than any other in-ear headphone I've heard so far.

With the iSine 10, Audeze completely reinvented the in-ear headphone. I'm not exaggerating. While every other in-ear headphone uses dynamic or balanced armature drivers, the iSine 10 has planar magnetic drivers, the same thin-film driver technology Audeze uses with all of their on-, and very high-end over-the-ear headphones. The driver isn't the only unique design feature, though. The iSine 10's

wild-looking earpieces are a good deal larger and designed in a completely different way than any other in-ear on the market.



At first I was concerned about the size of the relatively large earpieces. But the iSine 10 weighs next to nothing, at just 0.7 ounces, and they come equipped with ear hooks that wrap up and over your ears to secure the headphones in place. Even when I jumped around and tried to dislodge the earpieces, they stayed put.

It's also worth noting that while every other in-ear is a closed, noise-isolating design, the iSine 10 is a "semi-open" headphone. The upside to the design is that you can hear the world around you; but that might also be a downside. The iSine 10 doesn't provide much in the way of isolation from external noise.

But wait, there's more. The iSine 10 comes with two 59-inch cables, one a Cipher Apple Lightning cable for iPhones, the other a standard cable terminated with a 3.5mm plug. The Cipher Lightning cable automatically bypasses the iPhone's internal digital-to-analog converter (DAC) and headphone amplifier so it can use the Audeze-designed DAC and amp built into the cable. Android users haven't been forgotten:

An Android-compatible cable should be available in the fall. You can also use Audeze's 10-band equalizer app to tune the headphone's tonal balance to your liking.

The complete iSine 10 headphone, including the proprietary planar magnetic driver, is made in Audeze's facility in Costa Mesa, California.

Since my iPhone 6S has a 3.5mm headphone jack and a Lightning port, I listened both ways. Plugged into the Lightning connector, the iSine 10's deep bass definition, vivid dynamics, and wide-open stereo soundstage were far ahead of any comparably priced in-ear headphone I've heard. Switching to the standard cable with the iPhone 6S, the imaging and dynamics were still pretty stellar, but I missed the Lightning cable's remarkably precise low-end definition and overall transparency.

Continuing with my Astell & Kern Jr portable music player, the iSine 10 took on a fuller and more powerful sound. The explosive drum solos on saxman Peter Epstein's *Staring at the Sun* album were viscerally felt, and the cymbals' brassy shimmer caught me by surprise. Switching over to Audeze's Sine full-size on-ear headphones, it was clear they did a much better job hushing external noise. They had a sweeter, more relaxed tonal balance, but they sounded more closed in



and darker compared with the livelier iSine 10.

Next I popped on a set of Ultimate Ears' UE900s (\$399) in-ear headphones that house four proprietary balanced armature drivers—two low-frequency, one midrange, and one treble driver—in each earpiece. As I listened to Frank Sinatra belting out “Blues in the Night” from his Only the Lonely album, the iSine 10 put me more in touch with Ol' Blue Eyes' expressive phrasing and dynamics. By contrast, the UE900s flattened them and yanked the soundstage inside my skull. It was a lot less fun to listen to.

The Audeze iSine 10's sound will be a revelation to even the most experienced in-ear headphone buyers, but it won't be a good fit for anyone who needs maximum isolation from external noise. That's a big but, but in every other way the iSine 10 is a stunning achievement.