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High-End Fidelity: DeVore Fidelity's Speakers Look as Good as They Sound

By | Jeff Klingman - January 26, 2016



The nerve center of the DeVore Fidelity office is among the most comfortable—and comforting—rooms I’ve ever been in. In the center of the high-end audio company’s Brooklyn Navy Yard workspace sits a black leather couch, square up to two of their best-selling O/96 speakers—short, solid units with handsome hardwood exteriors in lace walnut, linked to a turntable spinning, on the day I visit, a lovely Beth Gibbons record from the early 00s. To sit there was to be swaddled in vinyl-lined walls; the thousands of LPs were exhaustively categorized in a method that managed to be both mysterious and reassuringly deliberate. Two resident cats traipse through. John DeVore tells me that Lulu Bear, an extremely chill and formidably chubby black tabby, is an eclectic listener, while her flatmate, Olive Twist, prefers downbeat electronica or jazz. Catering to music obsessives of all breeds has gradually become DeVore’s calling.

DeVore, the company’s founder, president, and chief designer, is the child of a professional concert pianist, and he grew up immersed in music, high- and low-minded. “I was into Led Zeppelin very early on, but the two records I really wore out

are weird. One of them is *Switched on Bach*, and then the Banana Splits album, which is now worth hundreds of dollars,” he says. “They were like early furries.”



DeVore moved to New York City in 1988, played drums in obscure East Village bands of the era—Savalas, Chopper 4, Noxos Pond, The Scholars. He felt a stronger connection to speakers than snares, even then. A job at Stereo Exchange, a still-active Manhattan hub for all manner of new and used speaker systems provided further access, deepening his obsession.

He wasn't, at first, convinced of the business potential of his hobby or a “slacker musician's” ability to pull it off. But friends kept commissioning gear from him, recommending his stuff to their friends who were starting recording studios and could use it. His own assurance in the quality grew, and the demand became undeniable. Industry awards and glowing reviews in audiophile publications have followed. DeVore credits the iPod with re-kindling the public's intimate relationship with music, the vinyl resurgence for an increase in focus, and the growing high-end headphone market for keeping standards high. A DeVore system isn't cheap; it runs from the low- to high-

thousands of dollars. But the aim is to create beautiful-sounding, beautifully handmade pieces that function, as former-customer turned long-time stereo cabinet-maker Anthony Abbate puts it, “as a piece of furniture and not a piece of NASA gear.” The philosophy's worked well. In 2015, DeVore sold over 200 pairs of speakers across the line, their best year ever.



“I want people's hi-fi systems in their living rooms so that everyone gets to enjoy it,” says DeVore. “I don't want [them] to be sequestered away in some little man den. I'm least interested in that kind of a customer.”

As we leave that vinyl-lined room to tour the rest of the facility, John walks over to his laptop and cues up an old Herbie Hancock record to play us out. It sounds real good. ♦