

TO TELL THE TRUTH

DYNAUDIO'S CONFIDENCE C1 SPEAKER LOOKS LIKE IT WAS MADE IN DENMARK, BUT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT. BY STEVE GUTTENBERG



The Confidence C1 minimonitor (shown on its optional stand) can be used on its own or in combination with other Confidence models, such as the Confidence Center shown above.

The country of origin is a key factor in determining the sound of audio components, especially speakers. I'm not kidding. American speakers tend to sound, well, American—big, bold, very rock and roll. British speakers are more polite, reserved, and civilized. Italian models are romantic, and a good number of German speakers sound very precise. Yes, these are heavy-

handed stereotypes, but you get the idea.

Dynaudio speakers, hailing from Denmark, are harder to nail down. They are sonic chameleons with less of an identifiable sound; they let the music and movies speak for themselves. That's my experience with the little Confidence C1, Dynaudio's compact, yet assuredly high-end monitor speaker. Unlike previous generations of bland-looking Dynaudio speakers, the new models

are unabashedly Scandinavian modern. The look is Danish, but the sound, that's something else.

Dynaudio is no stodgy, by-the-numbers enterprise, as its corporate pronouncements prove. The company has a wickedly dry sense of humor; one of my favorite of its statements is, "If we need more money, we won't build more speakers, we'll raise our prices." Yikes! I have no doubt Dynaudio could have jumped into the in-wall and in-ceiling speaker business when that sector started to take off a decade ago. It would have been easy to adapt its free-standing speakers' woofers and tweeters to produce a range of in-wall speakers and make lots of money, but that's not the Dynaudio way. The engineers took their time, and Dynaudio just started to offer in-wall models four years ago. That's a pretty typical product cycle for this company; its speakers have unusually long gestation periods. Dynaudio invests 10 percent of its profits in research and development each year.

The traditions of Danish furniture craftsmanship are alive and well at Dynaudio. Each speaker cabinet is built from start to finish by one carpenter. The C1's cabinet, like most Dynaudio designs, features a sandwich construction technique that bonds two different thicknesses of medium-density fiberboard to create an inert housing for the speaker's drivers. The C1's 1-inch dome tweeter is mounted on a 10mm-thick aluminum plate just below the 6.5-inch woofer. Both drivers are fitted to the machined, contoured "forward baffle" that's mechanically decoupled from the main cabinet body. The speaker's bottom plinth houses the crossover components that direct treble frequencies to the tweeter and midrange and bass frequencies to the woofer. The gold-plated, all-metal speaker wire connectors are themselves beautifully executed designs. Dynaudio offers a dedicated

floor stand that visually and sonically complements the C1. The Danes, they think of everything.

The woodworking skills are old-school, but Dynaudio's speaker driver building technology is state-of-the-art. I have seen its woofers and tweeters used on countless high-end speakers over the years. Dynaudio is one of Europe's largest speaker manufacturers but still manages to utilize the best of old and new technology in its factories. It is a very "green" venture, so the company's buyers make sure the Confidence series speakers' maple, rosewood, cherry, and black ash veneers come from nonendangered trees. The speakers are also offered in a piano black finish and special-order veneers or paint finishes are available to match your decor. The finish choice does,

by the way, play a part in the speaker's visual flavor. The maple is modern and sleek, the rosewood and cherry more traditional, and the black finishes lend a more elegant and refined appearance. As you can see, Dynaudio takes a very European approach to design aesthetics.

The speaker's sound is a beguiling combination of sweetness and light—richly balanced, yet effortlessly detailed. The C1 is unspectacularly natural on my acoustic jazz CDs. It's not the sort of sound that bowls you over at first, it's more subtle than that. (That Danish influence again.) Over time as you listen to the C1, you realize it excels at revealing nuance—the breath of the singer, the tactile touch of the percussionist, the soaring harmonics of brass instruments. Ella Fitzgerald's voice comes across as a fully formed human pres-

ence, as if she is right there between the speakers. Rock music's dynamic punch reaches far beyond what I would expect from a speaker that stands less than 18 inches tall. The little C1 can kick out the jams and make me sit straight up in my seat. It produces enough bass on its own so a subwoofer will not be a requirement for most music systems. The bass is extraordinary in its finesse and dexterity: Every note is defined, without a hint of boom or bloat.

The C1s' stereo imaging is remarkably precise, so the outlines of the instruments and vocalists on my CDs stand out in bold relief and the "spaces" between the musicians are more apparent. This level of clarity is one of the things that separates high-end speakers from merely good speakers.

Enjoying DVDs over the C1s in my

small bedroom stereo home theater system, without the assistance of a subwoofer, is an eye-opener. King Kong's rampages in New York City rocked and rolled with abandon and the nasty encounter on the Empire State Building with the airplanes temporarily fools me into thinking I am listening to a surround-sound system.

Dynaudio offers a broad range of models, starting with the Audience 42 bookshelf speaker for \$850 per pair. The C1 is the "entry-level" Confidence speaker—a complete Confidence home theater system would probably include either the C2 and C4 tower speakers (\$12,000 and \$18,000 per pair, respectively) matched with the \$6,500–each Confidence Center speaker. The C1 might serve as surround speakers and/or front left and right speakers in a multi-

That stylish, anthracite-colored baffle on the front of the Confidence C1 is not firmly attached to the speaker cabinet. Instead, the baffle "floats" on a compliant gasket that helps isolate the cabinet from the vibration of the woofer.

channel home theater system. Any of the three Dynaudio subwoofer models—the \$1,000 Sub 250, the \$1,500 Sub 300, or the \$2,000 Sub 500—would round out the home theater installation.

The Dynaudio Confidence speakers combine audiophile-grade refinement with uninhibited home theater prowess that few audiophile speakers can match. I guess that's part and parcel of that unpredictable Danish approach. **HE**

■ **PRICE:** C1 \$6,500 per pair

■ **CONTACT:** 630.238.4200, dynaudio.com

