



Bowers & Wilkins AM-1

If good fences make good neighbours, what do good outdoor speakers make? If you happen to own a set of outdoor speakers, I'm sure you know the answer. For those of you who don't, I'm sure you can guess.

It can be a tricky business keeping up good relations with other human beings. Thankfully though, if you're considering the Bowers & Wilkins AM-1s, that's all the trickiness you'll have to deal with, given their elegantly simple design and mounting solution.

The AM-1s (Architectural Monitors) are a thing of beauty. They're tastefully uncomplicated and neat, giving them a modest, albeit no-nonsense aesthetic. In true B&W style, the build quality both looks and feels impeccable all round, which immediately gives one

the confidence to leave them exposed to the elements.

To keep everything sealed off, B&W has employed a passive bass radiator in place of the more traditional bass port. This keeps all the dust and moisture and creepy crawlies out of the enclosure, while delivering a generous, well-controlled low end. The enclosure itself is highly rigid and constructed from glass-filled plastics, topped off with a rust-proof aluminium grille.

The wiring is also neatly sealed inside the swivelling mounting arm for a wonderfully elegant installation solution. You will have to whip out your drill, but a mounting template is included in the user manual, making it all seem relatively straightforward.

Of course I wasn't that keen to drill a bunch of holes in my wall for a review,

so I had my test pair mounted horizontally indoors. For your convenience, the AM-1s can be mounted either horizontally or vertically depending on your listening position and the mounting arms swivel through 220 degrees for added customisation.

At their core, the AM-1s are a two-way design and use an inverted drive unit configuration. This means the tweeters are positioned below the woofer rather than above, allowing better sound dispersion when mounted high on a wall outdoors. The tweeters are a 25 mm aluminium dome design, while the woofers are fibreglass and weigh in at 130 mm.

The sound signature is confident and controlled straight off the bat. After a little breaking in, bass notes and hits began to warm and thicken into a gratifying overall fullness while retaining their





overall balance. They sounded disciplined!

That's perhaps a strange way to describe sound, but I think what I'm trying to say is that at some point they displayed reference speaker characteristics – traits I'm more used to hearing in my studio rather than my lounge.

But, while my reference monitors have a tendency to be harsh in certain frequencies and unforgiving of bad compressions, the AM-1s are not. They're still enjoyable. The result is a fantastic balance of precision and well-calculated roll-offs that sound clear and accurate without hardening up at higher volumes.

I spent some time testing the AM-1s as both stand-alone stereo speakers and as the two front speakers in a 5.1 arrangement. As stereo speakers they hold their ground assertively as well-detailed, eager performers. There was an excellent amount of bass that reached a little further than I expected.

The low rumbles of the approaching armies of Greece as they home in on the Trojan walls in *Troy* could be felt in your core, as could the modern electronic kicks of newer pop songs.

The midrange was full and thorough, providing clear, clean vocals that were full of nuance and detail. Even 5.1 mix

dialogue in a stereo arrangement was impressive.

I know this is not what the AM-1s are destined for, but it's always nice to know that their potential application extends well beyond the outside wall of your patio. The higher parts of the frequency range sparkled with distinction to round off a brilliantly clear and enjoyable listening experience.

The AM-1s retain their composure well at high volumes, but they're also brilliant at lower volumes. I found this particularly relevant because even though they can be used to start a party, your neighbours will probably tell on you.

I really enjoyed my time with the AM-1s. The more they grew into themselves the more I grew to love them. The combination of quality craftsmanship, thoroughbred audio roots and ingenious design make them impossible to ignore in this segment of the audio market – and in several others.

I don't have an outdoor sound set-up, but the AM-1s made me wish I did. And yes, they'd be just as at home in stereo or home theatre applications, where their compact size and wall-mount design would eclipse conventional solutions.

Justin Beachcroft-Shaw

VITAL STATS

Type..... Two-way inverted design with Auxiliary Bass Radiator (ABR)
Drive units..... 1x 25 mm aluminium dome tweeter, 1x 130 mm glass-fibre woofer
Frequency response..... 51 – 22 kHz on reference axis (wall-mounted)
Sensitivity 86 dB (2,83 V, 1 m)
Nominal impedance..... 8 ohms
Dimensions (HxWxD)..... 310 x 180 x 210 mm
Weight..... 4 kg each

Verdict

Ingenious design meets legendary Bowers & Wilkins sound reproduction.

Price R9 990 per pair

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Website www.bowers-wilkins.net

OUR RATING: 90/100

