

Redefining Home Entertainment

The lockdown's silver lining

When I originally agreed to write for the Home & Garden issue planned for April, I thought I'd be writing about how to hide rock-shaped speakers in your garden, how the latest weatherproof HDTVs are bright enough to watch outside on a sunny day, or how you can mount pool speakers underwater. I had no idea how much our lives were about to be changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Well, it's here, and we're all forced to spend lots of time at home. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I'm certain that by the time we're all in the clear, our leisure habits, our ways of having fun, and our relationships with our friends, our families, and our world will have evolved in some very positive ways. So if you promise to stay safe, I'll show you some special ways to enrich your life while we wait this one out.

Welcome to the world of high-performance audio and video, a world that is so enticing, uplifting, and magical that

you'll want to stay home more!

How do you get started? First, by changing how you listen. This part is actually easy, and the results are nothing short of amazing. The next time you listen to your present music system, simply expect it to sound like you are at the live musical event! This changes everything, because it allows you to listen for the wholeness and not be distracted by the musical fragments. Almost everyone has a solid memory of live music made by acoustic instruments.

Put on your favorite acoustic recording. Close your eyes if you must. On most music systems, you will quickly notice that there is a coloration, a roughness, maybe even a strain that makes you know it's not the real thing. Many of today's good systems will impress you at first, but within half an hour, the listening will become fatiguing. You'll want to go away and do something else. That's from your brain fighting to make it sound more real than it is.

Now it's time to make your experience



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improve. Always try a pair of exceptional speakers first, if your existing system can support it. (Feel free to ask for help with this.) On a tight budget, there are many used speakers from the 1980s and '90s, even earlier, that are still in great shape, and that won awards back in their day.

In the quest to find moderately priced equipment that keeps up with the big boys, I have spent years finding companies that make affordable speakers that cost very little, with new technologies that can stand up to some of the most expensive speakers today. If you'd rather buy new, get assistance if you can. The best speakers aren't always the biggest, and a professional can help you to fit the right speakers to your ears and listening tastes.

If you already have good speakers, there are amazing used receivers that will give you a big jump in performance for practically no cost. Top-of-the-line brand-name surround receivers that don't have the latest HDMI video connections go for a song (pun intended), but they have great power and good sounding DACs (digital audio converters), so both your source and your amp improve considerably.

If you're in the market for new speakers, you can find inexpensive integrated stereo amps with plenty of ultra-clean power and fantastic DACs. Just send the music from your phone or computer, and you have a complete system. Make sure you do your music downloads in a lossless format from now on, so your music can sound at least as good as a CD. In fact, streaming from TIDAL or Qobuz can exceed the fidelity of a CD!

If you want a receiver that plays surround sound, buying new might be a good idea. There are a few that are designed to be exceptional with music.

Imagine playing that favorite album or movie of yours, and hearing musical nuance that you've never heard in all of your previous plays. It will surely inspire you to listen to all of your favorite music again, for the first time . . .

And social distancing will go by in a flash!

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