TONEAudio

Music.Gear.Style. No.27 February 2010

OMG! We're Not Square Anymore!

Superlative Performance:
The YG Acoustics Anat Studio Speakers

Speakers for Everyone:
A Group of Great Small Speakers From Snell, ERA, Penaudio and More

MartinLogan's Custom Shop

Waterfall Acoustics Glass Speakers

We Revisit The Spica TC-50: Still Great After All These Years

Bob Gendron Goes to Toronto To Catch Guns N' Roses In Fine Form

New Music from ECM and more!

The Waterfall Iguascu EVO

Stellar French Beauty

By Jeff Dorgay

Waterfall's designer, Cedric Aubriot, has been an audiophile, building his own speakers since his childhood and has always "dreamed of building a see-through speaker."

Though relatively unknown in the U.S. until recently, Waterfall Audio has been selling speakers in Europe since late 1999. Their unique, all-glass design is sure to please the audiophile who requires a healthy dose of style to go along with the music.

Hard-core audiophiles might wonder at first how the all-glass enclosures could work properly, but after a short listen, you can see that Waterfall has done a fantastic job in conquering glass as a cabinet material. In case you are wondering, each of the speakers is named after a famous waterfall somewhere in the world. Very stylish indeed.

As Nadine Dewell from Waterfall explained to me, "When making cabinets from wood, you have a slight room for error when cutting the cabinet pieces. But with glass, everything has to be perfectly true or the edges become uneven." Running your fingers across the surfaces of the Iguascu's, you immediately notice the flawless execution of their design. She told me that Waterfall's designer, Cedric Aubriot, has been an audiophile, building his own speakers since his childhood and has always "dreamed of building a see-through speaker."

Once the pieces of glass are water-jet cut to a 150-micron tolerance, they are bonded together with an adhesive that is cured by ultraviolet light. Dewell explained that this is also a painstaking process that requires "just the right amount of glue." You can see more of the production process here:

www.waterfallaudiousa.com/About_Us.html

The secret to getting an untreated glass cabinet to work without acoustic cancellation is Waterfall's Acoustic Dampening Tube that fits behind the bass/midrange driver. Coupled with the eight-inch passive radiator at the bottom of the enclosure, this gives the Iguascu's tight, controlled bass.

The Iguascu's have an MSRP of $4,495 per pair, USD, and the columns are a manageable 10-by-10 inches, only 34 inches tall and weigh 31 pounds each. The footprint is similar to that of a pair of small mini-monitors on stands. They use a six-inch woofer and a .8-inch silk-dome tweeter; the French company Atohm produces both drivers.

I must admit that the "wow" factor on these speakers is high: they are gorgeous.

The Iguascu's came meticulously packaged and were a snap to set up thanks to their light weight, but I would highly suggest using cotton gloves for moving them around as the glass fingerprints easily. I must admit that the "wow" factor on these speakers is high: they are gorgeous. The Iguascu's received high praise from every one of my friend's wives who saw them. These speakers look particularly cool in a more contemporary setting because you can set your living/listening room's lighting to shine through them.

Once unpacked, the speakers were very easy to set up. I ended up with speaker placement closer together than I might normally use for small floor-standing speakers, with almost a mini-monitor-on-stands-style placement. I had the best luck in my listening room with the tweeter centers about six feet apart and about three feet from the rear wall, with only a few degrees of toe-in. I experimented with the speakers on carpets of various depths and I would advise against putting them on an extremely dense or fluffy rug without using the supplied spikes, because it will interfere with the travel of the passive woofer. *(continued)*

The quality of the bass response can be varied somewhat by attaching the yellow weights to the passive radiator. More weight will give you a weightier yet slower and more-rounded bass response, and less or no weight will give you faster, punchier bass. This should come in handy if you have a somewhat over- or underdamped listening room, making the Iguascu's very versatile in a wide range of locations.

Though the Iguascu's have a rated sensitivity of 88db, I found them easy to drive with the lower-powered amplifiers that I had on hand, the Naim Uniti (50wpc/solid state) and the Octave S40 (40wpc, vacuum tubes). Running through a series of test tones, I was able to hear solid output at 45hz, confirming the published spec of 48hz. But after 45 hz, the low-frequency response cuts off quickly.

The Sound

I spent equal amounts of time with the Iguascu's in my smaller living-room system and in my main listening room, and Iwas equally impressed. Break in was relatively short; the speakers sounded good right out of the box and within a few days of continuous play were completely up to speed.

To stay in the French groove, I began my critical listening with Jean-Michel Jarre's *Oxygene* on Mobile Fidelity. I've had a sealed copy of this LP for years and have been waiting for a special occasion to break it open. What could be better than this? I started with my favorite track on the disc, "Oxygene 3," which has some spacey synthesizer riffs over the top of a gentle beat. While not possessing anything for judging tonality due to the all-electronic instruments, it does give a great spatial perspective to what a system can muster. So far, so good.

Moving right along to the remastered Beatles Mono Box set, I spent more than a few hours listening to a majority of my favorite Beatles tracks and was quite satisfied with what I was hearing. The Iguascu's did a great job of creating a large soundstage, even with a mono source. It's almost like seeing if a color video monitor does a great job with monochrome reproduction.

Back to the MoFi catalog for a while, I got into a late '70s mood, listening to John Klemmer's *Touch*. While not a favorite of jazz purists, the echoplex applied to Klemmer's saxophone is a good reference for large soundstaging and in many ways is not unlike the wide soundscapes that Jarre paints. Again, the Iguascu's passed this with flying colors, so I raised the degree of difficulty and put one of the new Blue Note reissues on the turntable and was very happy with the tonality and dynamics of *Sonny Rollins, Vol.1* that will be out by the time you read this. Rollins' sax exploded out of the speakers, and the drum kit in the background was spot on.

Various vocal tracks were also excellent, with great tonality and a very natural quality to both female and male voices. Johnny Cash and Tom Waits had the required amount of weight, while Ella Fitzgerald and Peggy Lee were light and airy without sounding nasal or tipped up in any way. I had equally good luck with light chamber music and wind pieces, so if your musical taste (and normal listening level) is slightly more to the mellow side, the Iguascu's will be excellent listening companions.

The only place these glass speakers fell a bit short was when I punished them with very loud rock music. When blasting Led Zeppelin and Korn at ridiculous volumes, the soundstage collapsed somewhat with details becoming smeared. *(continued)*

The Iguascu's did a great job of creating a large soundstage, even with a mono source. It's almost like seeing if a color video monitor does a great job with monochrome reproduction.

So if you like to play this kind of music at very high volumes, the Iguascu's may not be for you. But keep in mind, this was somewhat cruel and unusual punishment.

Do you want a mere box or a work of art?

If aesthetics mean little to you, the chance of achieving this level of performance for a slightly lower cost is a distinct possibility. Bbut I can't think of anything combining this level of performance in such an attractive container. If you have held off on putting speakers in your living room because you don't want a pair of square wooden boxes sitting near your Noguchi table, your search is over. The Waterfall Iguascu's are truly a work of fine art that sound great as well. ●

The Waterfall Iguascu EVO
MSRP: $4,495/pair

MANUFACTURER

Waterfall Audio USA
864-569-0184
www.waterfallaudiousa.com

Waterfall Audio
– Z.A Les Praderies
Carcés, France
+33 (0)4 98 05 11 30
www.waterfallaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source Technics SL-1200 turntable w/SME 309 arm, Sound Hifi Mods and Soundsmith "The Voice" cartridge. Simaudio Moon LP5.3/PS 5/3 phono preamp

Digital Source Sooloos music server, Simaudio 750 CD player/DAC

Preamplifier Burmester 011

Power Amplifier Burmester 911MK 3

Integrated Amps Naim Uniti, Octave S40

Speaker Cable Shunyata Orion

Interconnects Shunyata Aurora

PowerRunning Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners, RSA HZ power cords, RSA Mongoose power cords, Shunyata Python CX power cords