

Soundbites Review in HiFi World February 2012

This modular hi-fi shelf system, comprising three level Base 01 Platforms and three level StarBase Frame, is rather more than your basic rack. It steers clear of the usual high mass, rigid, spike-footed designs.

The Base platform utilises a suspension system. In effect, you have a skeletal frame and, upon this is fitted a series of platforms that sit without fixing, within. Each uses compliant beams supported by two feet that cantilever at each end providing tiny amounts of movement. This takes the load and passes it to the damper that is in turn, bonded to the frame, reducing airborne energy and, theoretically, distortion. An intriguing design, my only gripe with this particular variant, was the tripod design. For some, the rear, centrally-placed leg may get in the way of cables - but a four-legged version is available for those who need it.

The frame is available in black (silver on special order) with black or silver legs and platforms; each shelf can be supplied in different heights and impresses even before you fully unpack it. The packaging is a design feat in itself. A model of simplicity and logical thought, inside the outer box, each and every shelf is self-contained within a slide-out cardboard tray for easier building. Once constructed, I grabbed a bunch of CDs spanning a variety of genres for testing. I left the majority of my system resting on my reference shelving system, the Avid Isorak. I then isolated the CD player, placing it on a simple light table of the sort you might find in Ikea.

In comparison to the table, the Base offered an *immense* sense of clarity. The air and space surrounding the instruments on each CD reached almost desert-like proportions. It was, in the context of a 'mere' shelf, quite a shock. Another immediate effect was how clean the signal was across all frequencies. It was as if the Base reached into the mix with a scrubbing brush and removed the muck and dirt off the edges of the upper mids and bass. Obviously interacting with the Base's isolation properties, the music was steadily stripped of several layers of insidious distortion that infects most of our music, often fooling us into blaming a major hi-fi component.

It took all of five seconds for the Base to prove the importance of a good set of hi-fi shelves and to validate this particular design. Playing a range of music genres on the CD player with the Base, gone now was that slight screech on female vocal tracks; lower frequencies felt clean, almost cool with greater focus and a leaner, more menacing heft. Treble flew through the air with gay abandon while strings had great sway.

I then compared the Base to my reference Avid Isorak shelf system. The Isorak is no mean performer, providing a rich, almost vinyl-like aspect to its presentation. It has a tremendous capability to reach into a song and retrieve previously lost detail and so would be a challenge to the Base. Running it side by side for a few hours was very revealing. The Isorak performed admirably but the Base pushed the sonic boundaries to new levels. More muddle was removed, with the Base allowing organic instruments to provide believable texture, while



vocals sounded fresher, gleaming like chrome but without a hint of forwardness.

The most impressive part of the Base's improvement was heard in the lower frequencies. The Base added a deep, descriptive bass that revealed new aspects of the music that made you think twice about previously familiar recordings. I swear I could even hear sub-bass emanating from my Quad ESL-57s [really? Ed.]. I'll be seeing flying saucers land in my backyard, next ...

This is a very special set of shelving – a Rolls Royce rack, in fact. It's a design that has been carefully considered and systematic in getting to the root of those destructive resonances that wantonly circulate around our hi-fi systems. Don't see this system as a set of pretty shelves that will go nicely with the lamp and curtains, **see it as a genuine upgrade that will have you re-evaluating much of your music collection.**

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