



NEW REVIEWS

BESPOKE SPEAKERS

WHETHER YOU FLAUNT IT OR HIDE IT, **ATLANTIC TECHNOLOGY'S 8200 SYSTEM** FITS YOUR HOME LIKE A CUSTOM-TAILORED SUIT.

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN PHILLIP

I think it is safe to say my home is not like yours, and yours is not like your neighbor's. I think it is also safe to say that Atlantic Technology's new 8200 speaker system will look and sound wonderful in all three.

Most speaker systems force you into a certain configuration, a certain look, a certain sound. Instead, the 8200 system allows you to decide how your speakers will present and perform. Do you desire an all-out audio enthusiast-style setup, with your speakers on bold display for all to covet?

Or do you prefer a more discreet installation, with your speakers completely concealed? Your installer can tailor the 8200 to either situation—and any other you can imagine.

With its extensive flexibility, the 8200 system brings to mind an elegant Lego set. If you want the speakers to be seen, order them in gorgeous glossy black or veneer panels that clip firmly onto the speaker sides. If the speakers are to be concealed behind fabric, as they are in many high-end home theaters, you can eschew the side panels entirely.

If you demand powerful bass but lack the space for a file-cabinet-sized subwoofer, the system's compact PedWoofers lets your installer tuck extra



subs into nooks and crannies that are too small to accommodate the monstrous subwoofers that typically accompany high-end home theater systems. Two PedWoofers can match the power of nearly any large subwoofer, and are much easier to place discreetly than one large sub.

Of course, you cannot position a speaker just anywhere and expect it to perform at its best. Atlantic has taken this into consideration with the 8200 system. Placing a subwoofer in a corner, for example, may make the bass sound boomy and undefined. Atlantic solves this problem by including powerful equalization controls in the subwoofer amplifiers. The controls allow your installer to fix such problems by attenuating bass frequencies reinforced by various subwoofer placements. A remote control for the subwoofer amps lets you leave the bass as your installer set it, or select from four preset bass equalization modes to enhance the sound for movies, music and even late-night listening.

The front left, center and right speakers are similarly

The SA8200 subwoofer amplifier (top) provides 350 watts of power for each of two PedWoofers. The LED display in the upper left lets you make temporary volume adjustments, then easily return to the original level.



A machined aluminum bezel (above) provides a sturdy, stylish mount for the tweeter used in the 8200 LR and 8200 C. The speakers use the same drivers and crossovers, and sound almost exactly alike, as they should.

flexible. All include three switches that fine-tune the system for any setting, whether the surroundings are surfaced in sound-reflecting materials, such as wood and marble, or ornamented with overstuffing,

sound-absorbing furniture and thick draperies.

Another switch compensates for the slight muffling effect that occurs when speakers are mounted behind a perforated video screen. A third switch optimizes the sound for situations in which the speaker is mounted in a cabinet or against a wall. The switches combine to produce 12 equalization options, plenty enough for precise tuning.

I must mention that the 8200 is one of the first few speaker systems to earn THX Ultra2 certification. That means the 8200 has passed the most stringent quality tests devised by THX, Ltd., a company founded by *Star Wars* creator George Lucas, and is suitable for use in rooms up to 6,000 cubic feet. While the merits of THX's certification standards have been intensely debated, many audio pundits, including myself, feel that in some cases the characteristics necessary to gain THX approval have made speakers sound worse, not better. With the Ultra2 program, however, the THX certification rules are now much wiser.

While I have yet to be impressed by the special Ultra2 modes THX has created for surround-sound processors, the three Ultra2-certified speaker systems I have tested to date rank among the finest home theater speakers I have heard. It seems THX, in its Ultra2 form, may finally represent the reliable mark of quality the company heralded more than a decade ago.

My first thought upon hearing the 8200 system in my home is: *It's right.* With most speakers, a certain tone or style of sound is

■ DESCRIPTION

Home theater speaker system includes three front speakers, two or four surround speakers, and two or four subwoofers (each pair of subs driven by an included 700-watt amplifier).

■ COMPONENTS

8200 LR and 8200 C: two 8-inch woofers, two 5.25-inch midrange, one 1-inch silk-dome tweeter.

8200 SR: two 6.5-inch woofers, two 1-inch silk-dome tweeters.

8200 PedWoofer: one 12-inch woofer.

■ CONNECTIONS

8200 LR and 8200 C: two pairs 5-way metal binding posts (biwireable; accepts bare wire, pins, spade lugs, banana plugs and dual banana plugs).

8200 SR and 8200 PedWoofer: 5-way metal binding posts.

SA8200: stereo analog line-level input and output, 5-way binding posts for left/right speaker input and output, 5-way binding posts for amplifier output.

■ DIMENSIONS

8200 LR: 31.7 x 9.3 x 15.6 inches (hwd).

8200 C: 16 x 31.7 x 11.5 inches (hwd).

8200 SR: 19 x 14.7 x 10.4 inches (hwd).

8200 PedWoofer: 29.6 x 9.3 x 15.6 inches (hwd).

SA8200: 5 x 19 x 14 inches (hwd).

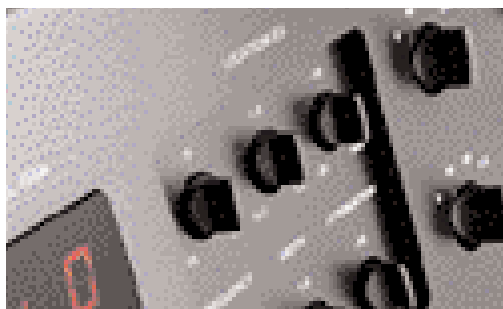
■ PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: \$10,000 to \$21,000, depending on configuration and finish

CONTACT: 781-762-6300

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Parametric equalizers (right) in the SA8200 offer controls that select the frequency being adjusted, the size of the frequency band affected by the adjustment, and the amount that the equalizer boosts or cuts the affected frequency band.



readily apparent; such individuality is, in my opinion, a downside. As with distinctive personalities like Cher or Kid Rock, a brief meeting with an idiosyncratic speaker might amuse, but you would tire of it if it were present every day. To my joy, the 8200 system initially reveals no character at all, which I consider the mark of an excellent speaker. I feel my DVDs sound almost exactly as they did on the dubbing stage where the soundtracks were produced.

I start with two of the PedWoofers and promptly upgrade to four—the number required to meet THX Ultra2 performance standards. Two sound good; the PedWoofers' medium-sized 12-inch speaker cone produces a sound that is noticeably more defined and precise than that of the 15-inch cones found in many large subwoofers. But moving up to four PedWoofers, driven by two of Atlantic Technology's SA8200 subwoofer amplifiers, smoothes out the sound and lets the system play louder.

For most of my listening, I turn the system up to Dolby reference level—the same level as in a commercial theater, which is really too loud for a home theater—just because I can. Even at such an extreme volume, the system never strains; the sound does not turn harsh or distorted. Rollicking soundtracks, such as the one on the *Ice Age* DVD, lend my home theater all the excitement of an amusement park ride.

Experiments with the switches on the backs of the 8200 LR left and

right speakers and the 8200 C center speaker further refine the sound.

Prolonged listening and comparisons with the other two Ultra2 systems I have on hand reveal a slightly bright, trebly sound when the switches are set to the “standard/THX” position, but one flip of a switch on each speaker tunes the treble exactly to my liking. Your installer, by the way, will be happy to set these switches for you—no technical expertise on your part is required.

Although another THX Ultra2 system might be more appropriate for your particular situation, the Atlantic proves my favorite overall because it sounds a little better than the other two I have tried. It produces a pleasing, enveloping sound with my stereo CDs—a feat few other THX-approved speakers achieve—and also sounds great with surround-sound music from SACD and DVD-Audio discs. Part of the credit for this versatility goes to the 8200 SR surround speakers, which can be set to produce a diffused surround-sound effect for movie soundtracks, or the more focused sound that works best for music.

It seems too tame a statement to say that anyone planning a large home theater should consider this system. Honestly, I would recommend it to anyone without the slightest hesitation. It is simply one of the best speaker systems ever to pass through my listening room. *For in-depth technical measurements and data, visit www.hedmag.com.* **HD**