

# Suite Dreams [Are Made of This]

We take an in-depth look at the eight biggest brands currently dominating the multi-room audio market

**W**hat a fine young adult multi-room audio has matured into. Once a byword for largely expensive groups of wireless speakers, produced by a select few high-end brands and chained together sometimes quite anaemically, multi-room audio has become almost a new standard in home listening.

These days most manufacturers allow you to incorporate existing hi-fi systems into your home network, while the quality and variety of the wireless options has grown rapidly.

Here we take in both Award winners in the category, as well as their biggest rivals and three alternative approaches from the biggest companies in the world.

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# Audio Pro


**WHAT HI-FI?**
**Rating**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The app is a little basic, but for sound quality at this price, Audio Pro is currently unbeatable

**A**ccording to Leonardo da Vinci, "simplicity is the ultimate sophistication". That mantra appears to have been adopted by Audio Pro. Its range of wireless speakers has earned the Swedish manufacturer multiple *What Hi-Fi?* Awards and, having embraced multi-room, it was the obvious choice as our Product of the Year in 2018.

The triumvirate on trial in our initial test was the class-leading Addon C5 speaker, its larger sibling the Addon C10 and the Link 1 (whose job it is to connect existing hi-fi components or wireless speakers into the chain). But here, we'll take into account every one of Audio Pro's multi-room products we've tested.

## Speakers

Audio Pro's boom-box-style range of Addon speakers are instantly recognisable, as is their unrivalled sonic prowess. The Addon C3, C5 and C10 are pretty much visually identical but for size, while the C5a has a volume indicator and pair of microphones on its head for its use with Alexa Voice Assistant. Each has the 'koala' driver configuration that is these speakers' distinguishing feature, with a pair of 20mm soft dome tweeters and mid/bass drivers (and reflex ports) growing in line with the cabinet.

The Addon C3 has a 9cm woofer, it measures 10cm on the Addon C5 and Addon C5a, while the Addon C10 has the largest at 13cm. The power output from the Class D digital amplification rises in similar increments: 15W, 40W and 80W respectively.

All four products house a large circular volume control flanked by sets of four smaller buttons on the top: for power-on, play/pause, input selection and Bluetooth pairing to the left, and pre-sets to its right. Here is also where you'll find the aux-in jack, which will save you having to fumble around the rear to find a connection.

The key to their performance is musicality unrivalled by anything at a similar price - or even a lot more. The level of detail is insightful, exposing the texture and timbre of each

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instrument and vocal line alike without underplaying cohesion or organisation in favour of nit-picking analysis. They time with metronomic precision, but temper it with a dynamic sense that captures rhythmic emphasis nicely. That dynamic expression is a strong positive over the speakers' performance. It simply does everything right, and without fuss.

The increased power and driver and cabinet size predictably ushers a grander performance with each step. But with each size and price increase, Audio Pro steps up almost every aspect of its game. There is more space to the presentation, more three-dimensionality and ambient detail, greater headroom for more

violent dynamic variation and an added maturity over the more delicate.

Whereas the Addon range once dominated Audio Pro's wireless speaker output, now there are class-leading products at either end of the spectrum. A fabric-coated cylinder standing just shy of 20cm, the A10 resembles more the kind of speaker we're used to seeing from its rivals, but it brings the company's sonic signature sound to a multi-room speaker at under £200.

The usual connections, wired and wireless, are featured, with the A10 having capacity for 3.5mm aux, Bluetooth 4.0, Apple AirPlay, wi-fi and Spotify Connect. It also supports MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC and Apple Lossless formats.

Inside, however, much has changed. Not wanting to sacrifice the full body that has become a beloved aspect of its class-leading sonic character, Audio Pro has packed in a 75mm long-throw woofer and bolstered its output with two 11.5cm passive radiators.

The use of a Balanced Mode Radiator (BMR) tweeter is most canny, however. Among its many benefits, this flatter-faced driver has the ability to offer wider dispersion than a traditional tweeter - up to 180° in fact - and so can make the most of the A10's cylindrical form, making it far less fussy with positioning.

It's one of the first things that jumps out with the A10. We love the directness of its siblings, but the versatility and spread of sound here is to be admired. It doesn't have the unwavering focus, nor the weight in the low end, but we are

treated to the same high quality sound all around our test room. There's a familial knack for timing and dynamic judgement, equating to a musicality to which it is simply a joy to listen.

The Drumfire is a 65cm-tall floorstanding colossus that proves Audio Pro's ability to retain its Award-winning sonic signature, even when the speaker tips the scales. The bottom houses a 20cm subwoofer powered by a 200W Class D amplifier to pump out the bass. On the back are two dials for crossover frequency and volume, and two switches: one to toggle the speaker's standby mode and the other to manage phase.

On top of the sub is the second part of the Drumfire's set-up, with two 11cm woofers and a 25mm tweeter. This box has an RCA input for an external analogue source, as well as an ethernet port and 3.5mm input. Features are otherwise in line with Audio Pro's speakers, down to the playback and pre-set panel on its roof.

The Drumfire's better-honed talents run further than the added power and bottom end over its family members - it is again a step up in terms of performance across the board.

Another Award for Audio Pro is barely news any longer, but the fact this year the Drumfire displaced the Naim Mu-so - a product we heralded as the nearest to hi-fi we'd heard from a wireless speaker - as our most expensive champion in 2018 is proof it operates on a different level from anything else around it.

Though there is a pair of unknown quantities in the Audio Pro line-up - the Addon C-Sub

helps those smaller speakers delve deeper into the low frequencies, while the A40 is set to receive a wider release following its design for the company's 40th anniversary - our time spent with the rest of the company's speakers allows us to celebrate it as the best-sounding multi-room suite available for the money.

## Hi-fi components

The Link 1's duties are to collect song selections from the app, connecting to your home network

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via either wi-fi or its ethernet input, and dispense via whichever output you have selected. These are limited to optical and analogue auxiliary - though with a 3.5mm-to-RCA cable included, connecting to any existing set up could hardly be easier. For just £100, any extra audio equipment - including another Addon speaker or a full hi-fi system - is now part of your multi-room network.

Though it shoulders a lesser burden, it performs its specific task with equal aplomb to the speakers. It fits our Addon T3 like a glove, but even hooking it up to feed Spotify into our reference hi-fi system doesn't hold performance back unduly, despite the limitations.

## Multi-room performance

It's difficult to imagine a less stressful set-up procedure. The Audio Pro app seeks out all available products connected to the home network, and they are all there to manipulate as you wish. Living with the app is a slightly different proposition, though. In many ways, it's extremely simple - 'drag and drop' to partner or separate speakers, either in stereo pairs or multi-room zones, and tweak the bass and treble. However, it can be a little buggy, and limited compared with rivals.

This is felt in the requirement to leave the Audio Pro app in order to play music from Spotify or Apple Music, which means you can't create on-the-fly playlists with tracks from those services or your own digitally stored collection. But the rudimentary nature and occasional bug is

forgivable when you consider the price and sound quality of the speakers it's controlling.

## Verdict

The Audio Pro range doesn't include the designated home cinema components of some of its multi-room rivals, and the app is a little lacking - and that might limit the overall appeal for some people. But for sound quality at the price, this system is currently unbeatable.

As much as anything else, your chosen path for migration to multi-room should be about whose speakers you want around your house. For us, Audio Pro makes that particular decision admirably simple.