

24 Crazy-Ass Hi-Fi Systems

Shôn Ellerton, July 15, 2020

24 photos of outrageously indulgent hi-fi systems you thought could never exist



Anyone or anyone that knows someone else ‘into’ hi-fi will appreciate the crazy-ass mad world of high-end hi-fi. For those who are not, I can take an assumption that this could only resemble a totally weird alien world littered with collections of weird and wonderful contraptions, many of which would not look out of place in a painting done in collaboration with [Giger](#) and [Dali](#). Giger to represent the wreathing, often sinister-looking, disarray of exotic cabling connecting and Dali to represent an assortment of geometrically-bizarre pieces of hi-fi comprising of turntables, amplifiers and speakers.

Before I continue, it may be well to note that I’m quite familiar with the world of hi-fi (high-fidelity) audio systems, having collected many pieces of hi-fi from my late teens along with a quite-substantial number of vinyl records, CDs and high-resolution FLAC audio files. Moreover, I worked in the hi-fi industry in sales and technical support within a friendly family-run company ([Graham’s Hi-Fi](#)) in London for a few years during my university years. Having been exposed to a reasonably good hi-fi system for the first time, I was hooked in no time. However, the hi-fi systems which I was exposed to looked decidedly average to the ones which I illustrate to you further along in this article.

I want to share with you some of the most extravagant, ridiculous, awesome, stupefying and crazy-ass looking systems that I have come across in social media. No doubt, some of these systems cost more than the average house and most would be owned by men with extremely tolerant wives, although I’m dead certain that many of these owners are single. Most of these owners will be

deemed purists of the audio world aiming to reach that impossible asymptote of perfection through the law of diminishing returns. Many own extravagant turntable setups, some of which look so complicated to set up and use that the sheer enjoyment of listening to the record is marred by the possibility that the equipment can never be set up perfectly. It is almost a compulsive obsessive behaviour in which you can never sit down properly because something is not positioned properly, for example, the speakers not aligned, the chair not being in the right location, a door in the room being open (because the sound will escape) and so on. For many, the sound offered by vinyl records is regarded as the best possible; however, this thinking is flawed, the reason for which is not discussed here. I write more about this in my article titled [*What's the Big Deal about Vinyl LP Records?*](#), hosted by Medium.

What is patently clear from looking at today's exotic high-end hi-fi, is that horn speakers and tube (valve) amplifiers are back in fashion big time. There are many types of speakers, but the most familiar for many is the conventional moving coil magnetic cone speaker which can be seen in practically all conventional electronics. Electrostatic and magnetic ribbon speakers, both of which offer astounding transparency in terms of sound reproduction, are relatively uncommon due to its price, size and notoriety of being able to be driven properly by most conventional amplifiers. Horn speakers have been around for a very long time, longer than that of the conventional cone speakers of today, but still have a place in the hearts of many with its openness of sound and very high sensitivity making them very easy to drive using very high-quality low-output tube amplifiers. It is not uncommon to have a hybrid speaker using a combination of cone and horn technology but to reproduce the entire audible sound spectrum from the lowest bass notes using horn technology requires VERY large horns, most of which look absurd and frightening at the same time. You can be the judge yourself from the photos.

Unfortunately, we cannot experience what these systems sound like by looking at the photos and it is difficult to imagine what they really do sound like. Would it be like sitting in a cathedral with a full-on organ recital? Or perhaps, in the middle of an open-air rock concert? I have taken part in auditioning very exotic hi-fi setups and, I can say this without a shadow of a doubt, that many of them sound simply awful with very little coherency and musicality. That's not always the case of course. Some sound exceptionally wonderful but there is one thing they have in common. They all command an enormous presence, but, for many,

the subtle nuance of the music is drowned by the highly analytical sound fragments being ushered forth like a torrent towards the listener. Some of these systems are downright frightening to listen *and* to look at. It's difficult to describe, but the symptoms I experience when this happens is that my foot stops tapping to the music and I get exhausted listening to the music, a term called *listener fatigue*.

Without further ado, here are some of the wackiest looking crazy-ass hi-fi systems I have seen posted throughout various hi-fi enthusiast groups in social media. I apologise in advance for not knowing who makes them all as there are simply too many of them out there. We count down from Number 24 starting reasonably sane but getting sillier and more crazy-ass as we embark on our journey to Number 1.

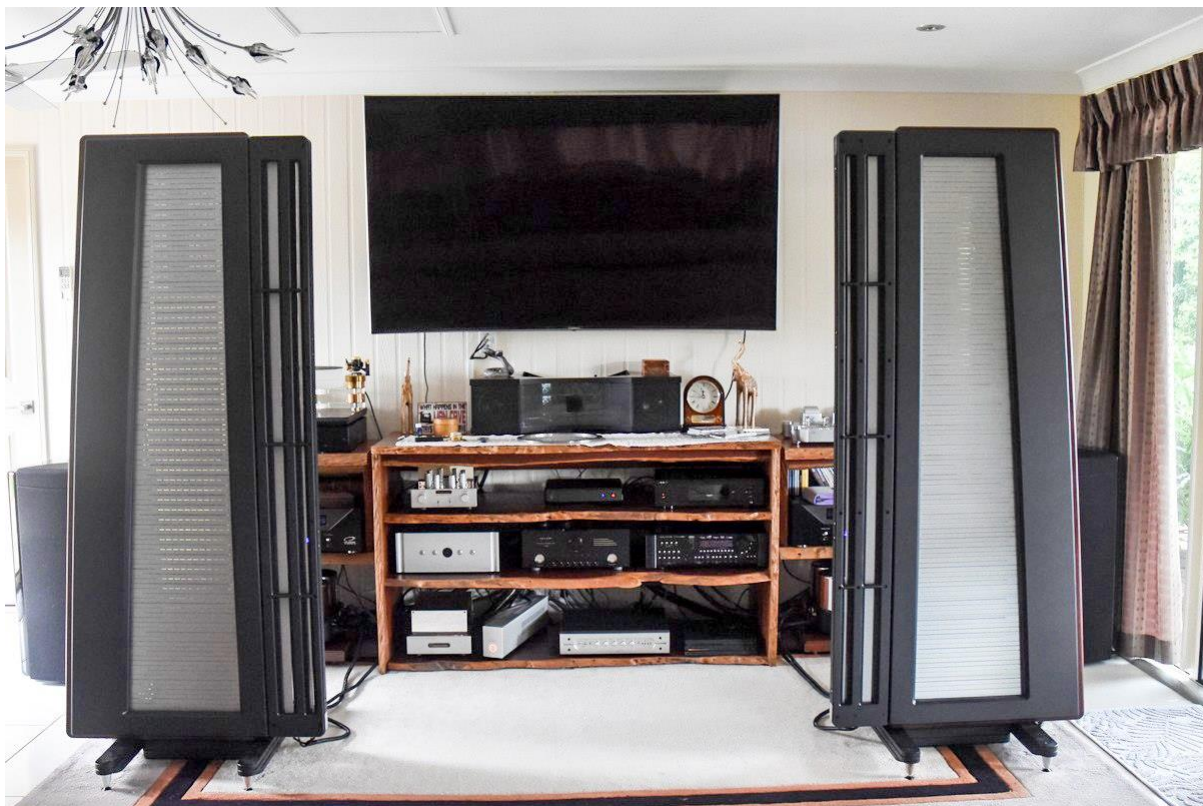
#24. B&W Nautilus

Let's start with something a little more on the 'normal' side of crazy-ass hi-fi. Loudspeaker design is often more of an art statement and this is inherent in B&W's famous Nautilus loudspeaker which can be had for a 'mere' 65,000 Euros. A word of warning. These speakers are likely to impale you, or at least, poke your eye out, should they be facing the wrong way in a darkened room.



#23. Apogee Magneplanars

Next up is a planar magnetic ribbon speaker setup probably made by Apogee Acoustics. I remember setting up one of these in the past for someone. They are immensely heavy with a very powerful magnetic force attracting all sorts of iron filings or whatnot. They require large current-dumping amplifiers the size of power stations and are visually obtrusive. However, in my opinion, they sound pretty good with respect to openness and transparency with the right setup although a subwoofer is often needed to complement the whole of the sound spectrum. Piano sounds awesome through magnetic ribbon speakers.



#22. The Triangle ART Turntable

Although not a complete system, we have to include a crazy-ass turntable as part of this list. This is the [Triangle Art Ultimate Limited Edition](#) turntable. It may not be the [Goldmund Reference](#) system, the world's most expensive turntable at over a quarter of million bucks, but it is certainly one of the most indulgent and gaudy looking ones I have seen. Those who like having their Mercedes gold-plated may go for something like this.



#21. Divin Majestic 'Shoe' speakers

In the next image is the Divin Majestic loudspeaker from [Goebel High End](#) looking not unlike the bottom of one of my dress shoes. Well, kind of, anyway.



#20. The Wilson Chronosonic XVX

The next pair of speakers comes from Wilson Audio, a renowned manufacturer of high-end loudspeakers for many years. These are the grossly expensive [Chronosonic XVX](#) speakers, the price of which won't leave you much change out of \$350,000!



#19. A once-elegant sitting room

The next photo is a good example of how an otherwise elegant sitting room can be made to look, inelegant?



#18. Infinity IRS V Reference Speakers

Next is a picture of Paul McGowan of [PS Audio](#) dwarfed by an Infinity IRS V speaker system. This speaker has certainly been around for awhile and I can remember them being the most expensive of its kind back in the 90s. I've not heard these speakers; however, being a very big fan of Paul and his PS Audio components, of which can be seen in the room, his legendary DirectStream DAC, I felt compelled to include this picture.



#17. The Reproduction JBL 4350 speaker

Next up is the Reproduction JBL 4350 loudspeaker. Now JBL is not known for its elegant design of loudspeakers, and this particular model, is perhaps, THE ugliest and largest amongst its arsenal of loudspeakers.



#16. MBL Reference

The next photo shows the really weird [MBL](#) Reference speakers from Germany and they, to me, look not unlike some crazy Van De Graff generator experiment with a couple of outdoor A/C inverter units stacked vertically behind them. At a quarter of a million Euros, it is unlikely that you'd ever own a pair. I'd be genuinely curious to hear what they sound like though. Here's a [link](#) to a review of them.



#15. Daffy Duck speakers

Next is one of the most ridiculous-looking speakers I've come across. I'm not sure what they are but from what research I came across, the image appears to come from Chile. Note the horn speaker units on top. Tell me they don't look like a pair of Daffy Ducks.



#14. The Tesseract Reference

Life wouldn't be complete without a set of 'Darth Vader' [Tesseract Reference](#) loudspeakers by Avalon Acoustics. Or maybe they look like Ku Klux Klan members wearing black outfits or some dark sentinels guarding the gates of Mordor. In any case, they look positively creepy and sinister. Great for scary parties like Halloween!



#13. Tubes, wires and corner speakers

Next we come to the horns, although I do not know who makes these particular ones. First off, at least we need to admire that the owner in question has a reasonable collection of material to listen to judging by his extensive collection of vinyl. There are many enthusiasts who spend all their energy (and money) in upgrading equipment rather than acquiring new material to listen to. Note here we have an eclectic collection of tube amplifiers in a sea of coiling interconnects and wires. As for the size of these speakers, they somewhat dominate the room. Pretty hideous.



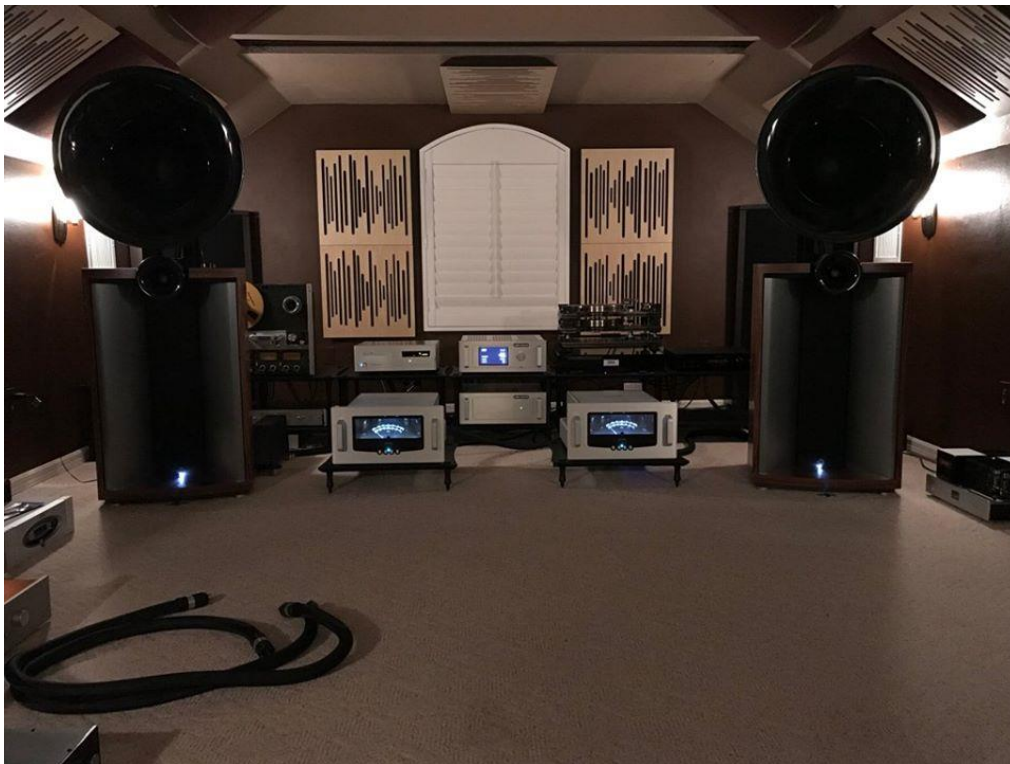
#12. The Trio Classico Avantgarde horn speaker

The next photo shows a pair of crazy [Trio Classico Avantgarde](#) horn speakers. What these could possibly sound like I have no idea, but they look like they mean business.



#11. The Duo Mezzo Avantgarde horn speaker

Next we have a fairly evil-looking system in what appears to be a converted attic. Certainly a space reserved as a man-cave for an aspiring Seth lord. Note the two power amplifiers with their well-lit power gauges to show you ‘the power of the dark force’. The two horns representing two ‘dark moons’ to remind you that binary black hole systems are destructive. And that black hoselike thing on the floor is probably some exotic interconnect built to be as thick and weighty as possible to convey gravitas. In reality, the room is really low making the speakers look absolutely enormous. They are the [Avantgarde Duo Mezzo](#), which in the link look very different indeed.



#10. Wealthy DJ turned Hi-Fi Nutter?

Another photo below of an Avantgarde Trio Classico setup but this time in an elaborate old-style room complete with oriental rugs, paintings, and gold rococo gilded mirrors. Maybe the guy who lives here used to be a DJ but turned into a horn and tube amps hi-fi nutter after winning the lottery.



#9. The Gestapo Horns

Now we are getting into the realms of being *really* silly. I have no idea what speakers these are but seriously. Look at them. Imagine sitting below these things in the ‘comfort’ of your own chair. It would be just like being interrogated by a pair of Gestapo officers holding megaphones. *‘Vee will ensure you vill be made as uncomfortable as possible!’*



#8. The Buddhist Alpenhorn

The next horn looks like a cross of an Alpenhorn and some sort of Far Eastern spiritual musical instrument, although a very large one at that! From the dropdown screen in the photo, it looks like this could also be the movie room. Imagine watching a Lord of the Rings movie and the dwarves blow on their horns prior to the big attack!



#7. The 'Plywood' Kit Horn

Oh yes, now we're getting into the kit stuff now. Let's break out that plywood and make ourselves some good 'ole horn speakers *au naturel*.



#6. Speakers you can hide in

Can't hide these next pair of bright blue speakers, but what you can do is hide *inside* them. Kids would love these!



#5. The Selfish System

I love this next picture. ONE solitary chair for, presumably ONE solitary person in the house enjoying listening to music by HIMSELF (can't be a *her*) This is the *selfish system*!



#4. The Scorpion Bodily Part Setup

I don't even know how to describe the next picture. It looks to me like a cross of a scorpion and a bodily private part with bicycle headlights supported by a metal frame that looks like it should hold up fireplace implements As for the two huge red horns in the back, they look like they are doors to another world. How anyone of a sane disposition can sit there in front of this setup is beyond wonder. Seriously. What gives?



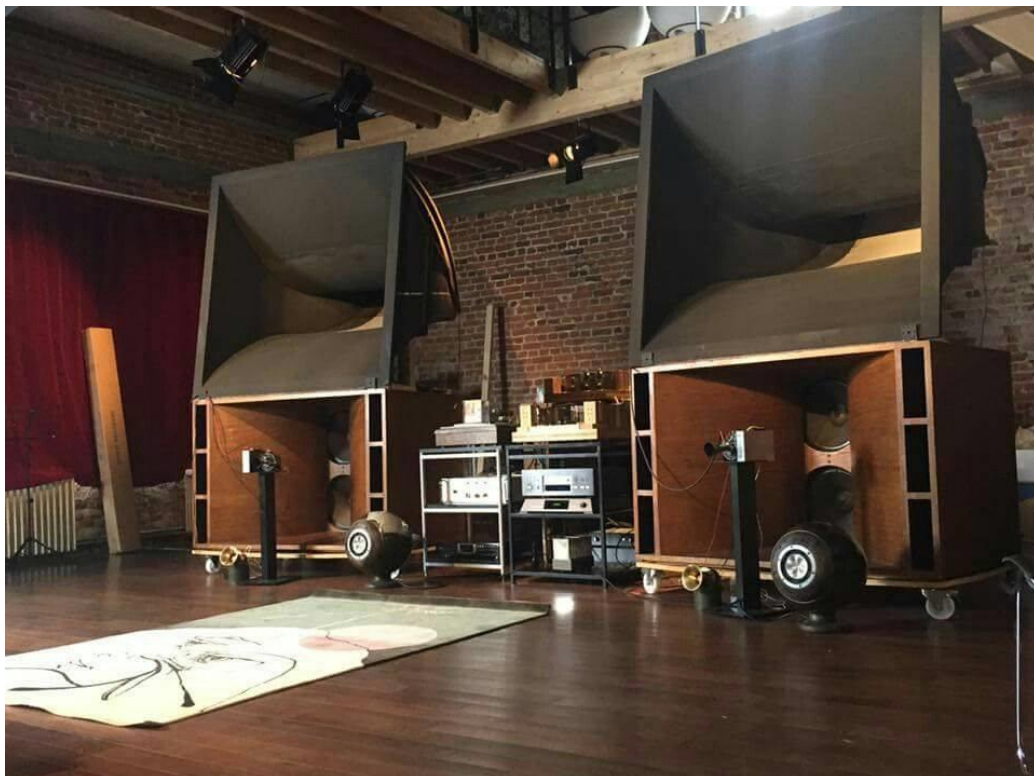
#3. The Teleportation Horns

I'm just going to make up stuff about the next photo. These horns are *teleportation horns*. You walk in through one horn. Then the little light turns on at the top. The light turns on at the top of the other horn from whence you emerge, hopefully intact, from the second horn. Need I say more?



#2. Boom Box Horns

Second to the last photo coming up. When giant-sized horns morph into boom boxes. Can we bring these to the skate park? We all want a pair of these. Right?



#1. The Horn of Hell

And the *piece de resistance*! This horn is large and scary enough to wake up the dead. That is all.

