



Pursuing the Truth in Audio and Video

AUDIOHOLICS™

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# Audioholics Top AV Gear Guide for 2015



Are you new to the audio scene? Perhaps you haven't been obsessively/compulsively checking out the latest gear to see what's the cream of the crop? No worries, Audioholics has you covered with our list of top picks in audio gear. Browse through twelve different categories ranging from floorstanding loudspeakers to cabling, and you'll be up to speed in no time at all. Happy hunting!

## Bookshelf Loudspeakers

**Budget Pick: NHT SuperOne 2.1** | [Review](#)

NHT's SuperZero has been a force to be reckoned with in the budget bookshelf speaker market for better than two decades. Today's SuperZero 2.1 naturally features some improvements over the original, but the basic formula remains unchanged: an ultra-compact, inexpensive 2-way, acoustic suspension design that concentrates on the midrange and highs, and leaves the low bass to a dedicated subwoofer. Now NHT is pairing the legend with their Super 8 subwoofer to create the Super Stereo: a 2.1 system aimed at delivering high quality audio for smaller spaces.

**MSRP: \$299.98/pair** | [Buy Now](#)



**High End Pick: Definitive Technology StudioMonitor 65** | [Video Review](#)

Definitive Technology has really evolved their sound and look over the years. These speakers are billed as, and really developed to be, studio monitors, hence the name - StudioMonitor 65's. That means that at least one of the design goals was to create a speaker with enough dynamic range, fidelity, and finesse to be usable by recording studio professionals as a reference speaker for mixing and mastering music. So that's what they're supposed to be - and they are. They sound incredibly accurate. These may be the best bookshelf speakers we've ever heard for under \$1500. The best part is, a pair of these only cost \$900. And these studio monitors have more bass than several towers we've had experience with without sacrificing the delicate highs and balanced, realistic midrange. If this were the 1600's Def Tech would be in danger of getting burned at the stake... Because it's like... Witchcraft...

**MSRP: \$900/pair** | [Buy Now](#)



## Floorstanding Loudspeakers

### **Budget Pick: Pioneer SP-FS52** | [Review](#)

What would you say if we told you that a company historically known for their A/V electronics has redefined the loudspeaker market with their budget speaker line designed by industry veteran Andrew Jones? Now take your amazement one step further when we tell you that for under \$650 you get a pair of four driver 2.5-way tower speakers, a matching three driver MTM center channel and pair of two-way bookshelf speakers with an 8" 100 watt powered subwoofer. From a sound quality standpoint, the SP-FS52 towers alone are worth the admission price of the entire system. These speakers utilize design elements not found in some pricier so called "high value" Internet Direct brands including vented pole pieces on their woofers, real ferrite magnet motors on their tweeters, air core inductors in their crossovers and braced cabinets. Their cabinets are even contoured for added rigidity. While they won't win awards with their looks, they more than make up for it with detailed rich sound that simply defies their meager asking price. If you're looking for a budget tower speaker for around \$500/pair, save your money and just buy the SP-FS52's for \$260. This has to be one of the best bang-for-the-buck speaker systems we've ever heard.

**MSRP: \$260/pair** | [Buy Now](#)



### **Midrange Pick: EMPtek R55Ti** | [Review](#)

If you want a speaker that can truly deliver a tonally accurate, dynamically lifelike reproduction of your music, and also happens to look stunningly beautiful, then the EMP Impression R55Ti's should fit the bill nicely. The R55Ti's give you a huge soundstage and can play exceedingly loud down to a modest 50 Hz, with little to no audible compression. Available in a high gloss red burl and black ash vinyl finishes, these speakers look as good as they sound, which is something we rarely find ourselves saying at this price point for a tower speaker system. The EMP R55Ti's come with a 5 year warranty and 30 day money back return policy with free shipping both ways. This makes for a risk free trial for you to demo these speakers in the most critical and important listening room - your own home theater. Highly recommended!

**MSRP: \$695/pair** | [Buy Now](#)



### **High End Pick: Aperion Verus Grand** | [Review](#)

Known for producing high-quality, budget-oriented loudspeakers, we had high hopes that Aperion would unveil a lineup with higher audiophile aspirations. Aperion did not disappoint, with the Verus line taking things to the next level. Their specially designed tweeter is capable of playing down much lower than most conventional dome designs with exceptional power handling. This allows the system to be crossed over at a lower frequency – in this case 1.8kHz – which improves off axis response by reducing beaming effects of the larger mid drivers as wavelengths become shorter than the diaphragm diameter. We reviewed their entire new Verus 5.0 system, and found it to sound exceptionally good with ample output capability, stunningly great imaging and lack of compression when really cranking it up loud. Available in furniture grade gloss cherry wood veneer or piano black finishes, this is truly a great speaker line regardless of price, and fit and finish is excellent, screaming high end.

**MSRP: \$2,000/pair** | [Buy Now](#)



## Subwoofers

### Budget Pick: SVS PB1000 | [Preview](#)

It's no secret, we love subwoofers. And we love the PB-1000 for its amazing price/performance ratio. The PB-1000 has a single long-throw 10" front-firing driver and a 3.5" port with inner and outer flares. This configuration delivers a lower frequency response of 19-270 Hz +/- 3 dB compared to the 24-260 Hz +/- 3 dB response of the SB-1000 (its \$499 sealed counterpart). The cabinet is 18.4" (H) x 15" (W) x 18.4" (D) with overall dimensions of 18.9" (H) x 15" (W) x 19.9" (D) (includes feet, grill, amplifier). Powered by a 300 watt RMS/700 watt peak DSP controlled Sledge STA-300D, the SB-1000 has plenty of power for the 10" driver. And let's say for some crazy reason you want to return it, or it breaks, or you want to upgrade, SVS's Bill of Right guarantees you a great customer experience. Let's recap. Great price, check. Great performance, check. Great customer service, check. Three checks and the PB-1000 breezes into a winning spot in our 2015 Top Picks Guide.

**MSRP: \$499** | [Buy Now](#)



### High End Value Pick: HSU VTF-15H mkii | [Review](#)

If you don't mind a huge box and your goal is the most possible output and extension from an affordable sub, you would be hard pressed to beat the HSU VTF-15H mkii sub. We reviewed the first version of the sub which did very well in our testing. HSU took it up a notch this year with a more powerful amplifier and higher excursion driver. This sub is one of the most affordable subs on the planet to earn the Audioholics Extreme Bassaholics rating. The hefty 15" driver with beefy 600 watt (continuous rated) amplifier and tunable modes also makes it the most flexible. Be warned this beast weighs a whopping 110lbs so it's no small feat to move. It will surely satisfy Grandpa Simpson as he yells "turn it up" during the THX intro just before his dentures shatter.

**MSRP: \$899** | [Buy Now](#)



## A/V Receivers

### Budget Pick: Sony STR-DN1040 | [Review](#)

The Sony STR-DN1040 does just about everything right. First off, it packs in more networking technology than many receivers that cost twice the price, including Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. With DLNA and Airplay, a USB port that reads FLAC files, and support for Pandora, Slacker, and vTuner, your entire digital music collection will find its home playing through this receiver. Controlling all of this is made easy thanks to Sony's intuitive mobile app and newly redesigned remote. But the STR-DN1040 isn't just about features, thanks to a larger transformer and noise reduction techniques at the board level, it sounds great as well. Though, it's not perfect, zone 2 functionality is minimal and the auto-setup mic is nothing special. Other than those two caveats, the STR-DN1040 does just about everything better than the competition without being heavy on the wallet. Highly Recommended!

**MSRP: \$399** | [Buy Now](#)



### Midrange Pick: Yamaha RX-A840 | [Preview](#)

Considering the RX-V830 won our [\\$1,000 A/V receiver comparison](#) last year, it shouldn't be a surprise that the new Yamaha RX-A840 is our midrange receiver pick. Coming in at \$900 (the lower end of the price scale in the comparison), the Yamaha's RX-A830 checks off just about everything you could ask for: 100W/channel of power, 7.2 channels of sound, 8 HDMI inputs (with one boasting MHL for connecting mobile devices) and a pair of outputs, YPAO auto-setup and calibration, a useful

array of legacy video inputs, and a full complement of pre-outs are all on the menu. For an additional \$100, you can also add Yamaha's WiFi adapter for wireless connectivity. The Yamaha also has their own proprietary post processing scheme with an assortment of DSP modes to allow you to add front height channels which they call "presence channels".

**MSRP: \$900** | [Buy Now](#)



### High End Pick: Denon AVR-X4100 | [Review](#)

The Denon AVR-X4100 4K Ultra HD Networking Receiver is the replacement to the AVR-4100. It basically updates its predecessor with the latest Dolby Atmos surround codec with discrete height channels. Denon has somehow managed to put together a new receiver that can appeal to everyone: the picky audiophile, the custom installer, and the feature happy Gen-Xer. Full 11.2 pre-outs, Audyssey MultEQ XT32 & SubEQ HT, HDMI audio support in multiple zones, network control, and more, all with a \$1299 MSRP. In fact, the AVR-X4000 has some new bells and whistles not found on any other Denon receiver, ever. It's the balancing act of keeping a host of features without compromising quality that earns the AVR-X4000 its place here.

**MSRP: \$1,499** | [Buy Now](#)



## Multichannel Amplifiers

### Our Pick: Emotiva XPA-5 Gen 2 | [Preview](#)

If you find your A/V receiver lacks the power needed to deliver the bombastic output levels that you crave, it's time to consider stepping up to an outboard power amplifier like the Emotiva XPA-5. Capable of delivering 200W of power with all 5 channels driven (where most receivers are rated with one or two channels driven), as well as seamlessly handling 4 ohm loudspeakers, the XPA-5 can give any AVR with preamplifier outputs a big shot in the arm. The best news however is the price. Amplifiers with this kind of output can easily cost several thousands of dollars. The XPA-5? Just \$999. If power is what you crave, we simply can't think of a better value.

**MSRP: \$999** | [Buy Now](#)



## Blu-ray Players

### Budget Pick: Sony BDP-S790 | [Video Review](#)

We'll keep this brief: the BDP-S790 is an excellent player. We understand why Sony dubs this product a "flagship". It has nicely backlit capacitance touch controls on top that glow when you use them. It's fast, produces an excellent quality picture, is ready for the 4K format of the future, and will stream all of the current leading sources for media. For \$250, that's not a bad package. If you want a Blu-ray player to serve as your entire entertainment hub, then this might be just what you need.

**MSRP: \$250** | [Buy Now](#)



### High End Pick: Oppo BDP-103 | [Video Review](#)

Oppo has hit another one out of the park. The BDP-103 may not be light years ahead of the [BDP-93](#), but it is ready for 4K conversion and the Marvell Qdeo processing is one of the best systems on the market in our testing. The player has some other whiz-bang features like 2D-to-3D conversion and improved performance in networking and streaming services like Netflix, YouTube, etc. Plus we like the cosmetic enhancements the new BDP-103 and 105 players flaunt. Audiophiles who emphasize analog audio performance will want to also consider this player's bigger brother, the BDP-105.



**MSRP: \$499** | [Buy Now](#)

## Soundbars

### Budget Pick: Pioneer SP-SB23W

Let's face it, we're fans of Andrew Jones' work, and when he sets out to design a budget soundbar system, we know it's going to be tough to beat. Featuring two 1" tweeters and four 3" mid/woofers powered by 6 – 28W amplifiers, as well as a wireless 6.5" subwoofer powered by a 50W amplifier, you're getting a lot of speaker for the money. Of course, the SP-SB23W can also handle wireless streaming via Bluetooth, and unlike so many budget soundbars, actually utilizes a composite wood cabinet as opposed to cheap plastic. For the price and the form factor, this Pioneer seems like a no-brainer to us.



**MSRP: \$400** | [Buy Now](#)

### Midrange Pick: Outlaw OSB-1 | [Video Review](#)

We've reviewed a bunch of soundbars, but not one like this. The Outlaw Audio OSB-1 uses the H-PAS technology we first saw demoed at the Atlantic Technology booth at CEDIA in 2009. H-PAS, which stands for Hybrid Pressure Acceleration System, is essentially a proprietary cocktail of several speaker technologies - it's bass reflex meets inverse horn meets transmission line...The final result is that an H-PAS design can deliver extended deep bass with low distortion in a way that you'd think just shouldn't work. But it does. Of course bass isn't the only thing to recommend the OSB-1. The soundstage is surprisingly natural and ALL of the modes, including the 3-channel mode which ghosts a center channel and the enhanced 5-channel mode are light years ahead of what any TV we've heard can offer. The identical unit is also available from Atlantic Technology as the PB235 for the same price. A wireless Bluetooth adapter is now available for both units.



**MSRP: \$799** | [Buy Now](#)

### High End Pick: Martin Logan Motion Vision | [Review](#)

The MartinLogan Motion Vision soundbar is nothing like the typical cheap, chintzy soundbars found on the shelves of most big-box stores. And for \$1499, it isn't priced like those "other" soundbars either. The Vision is MartinLogan's solution for consumers who want high-end sound without a rack of equipment or speakers scattered all over their room. It incorporates three of the company's acclaimed Folded Motion tweeters, four 4" long-throw woofers, and twin rear-facing ports. It's a little larger than most of the competition, but that's because it's designed to be run with or without a subwoofer. At first I was pretty skeptical of how much bass a soundbar could produce sans subwoofer, but after having the Vision in my home for a few months, I'm a believer. The Vision really shines when it comes to listening to music, but also does a commendable job with movies. The soundstage is big, though its ability to produce surround effects is inconsistent. My only big wish is that MartinLogan would choose to incorporate wireless music streaming functionality in future iterations of the Vision (more extensive bass management would also be nice). If you are looking for a sleek sound solution, but don't want to compromise on quality, the MartinLogan Motion Vision is worth a serious listen.



**MSRP: \$1,499** | [Buy Now](#)

## Headphones

### Over Ear: Budget Pick: Wicked Audio WI-8500 Evac | [Review](#)

The Wicked Audio WI-8500 Evac Headphones are \$60 headphones that you can find for closer to \$25 online. When you compare them to their \$60 competition, you'll find the other \$60 headphones have features such as in-line controls and microphones. While the Wicked Audio WI-8500 Evac Headphones don't have any of those features, what they do have is a very similar sound to those other, feature-rich \$60 headphones. Let me put it to you this way, the WI-8500 made our Product of The Year Awards because you can get the same (or better) sound quality with them, than with headphones that sell for double.

**MSRP: \$60** | [Buy Now](#)



### Over Ear: Oppo PM-3 | [Review](#)

Long known for their reference-grade Blu-ray players, Oppo made a huge splash in the headphone market with the introduction of their PM-3 headphones. Based on Planar Magnetic technology, the PM3s offer a rich, lush, detailed, and open presentation. At only 10oz, the PM-3 balanced great sound with a lightweight, portable form factor. Perhaps best of all, mobile devices can easily drive the PM-3s without the need of a dedicated headphone amplifier.

**MSRP: \$399** | [Buy Now](#)



### In Ear Pick: RBH Sound EP-SB Bluetooth Earphones | [Review](#)

The [RBH EP-SB](#) packs an impressive list of Bluetooth and wireless technology into a featherweight package. The EP-SB earphones combine an impressive array of the latest wireless technologies from aptX, CSR, Bluetooth 4.0, NFC and IPx4 – more acronyms than a brain surgeon's business card. AptX technology solves the problem of sending CD-like quality audio over Bluetooth so that sound quality isn't affected. Included with the earphones are a variety of tips that provide varying sonic performance depending on how you're using the earphones. From a fine-tuned listening experience on the couch to a tough companion at the gym or on the trails, RBH says these earphones are designed for active music listeners. As with their predecessors, anyone looking for respectably good performance from a pair of portable earphones would be remiss not to check these babies out. Best of all, you get RBH sound in a wireless package.

**MSRP: \$179** | [Buy Now](#)



## Home Theater In A Box

### Budget Pick: Yamaha YHT-399U

Want a 5.1 system for less than \$500? Want that system to use a real A/V receiver so you can upgrade down the line? Meet the Yamaha YHT-399U. Based on Yamaha's HTR-3066 receiver with 70W of power per channel, YPAO auto-setup and calibration, and support for 3D and 4K video, you also get a quintet of satellite speakers and an 8" subwoofer backed by another 100W of amplification. At this price point, there are of course compromises to be made. However, as a starter system with room to grow, it's hard to beat for the cost.

**MSRP: \$450** | [Buy Now](#)



### High End Pick: Onkyo HT-S9400THX

If you don't want to deal with the hassle of selecting a separate receiver, speakers, and subwoofer, but you still want a setup your audiophile friends aren't likely to laugh at, the Onkyo HT-S9400THX might be worth your time. That "THX" on the end of the model name of course means that this system is THX Integrated System Plus certified, meaning the system will have enough power to fill a small theater where viewing distances from the screen is 6-8 feet. In addition to respectable audio performance, you get all the latest goodies including 3D video and even 4K video upscaling, as well as Audyssey 2EQ for automatic setup and calibration. Considering you get all this for \$999, we feel it's hard to go too far wrong here.

**MSRP: \$999** | [Buy Now](#)



## Budget 5.1 Speaker Set

### Budget Pick: SVS Prime Satellite 5.1 Surround System | [Review](#)

A 5.1 system delivers a totally immersive surround sound experience for the price of a soundbar. If you're shopping for a high quality surround setup at a bargain price, we'd recommend putting SVS' Prime Satellite 5.1 Surround System on your shopping list. Consisting of a five of SVS' Prime Satellite Speakers and an SB-1000 13" subwoofer, this setup can fill a small to medium sized room with beautiful sound that you simply can't match with ubiquitous cube speakers. You can always add more Prime Satellite speakers to expand this setup in the future. The cost for the complete setup is \$999.99 direct from SVS.

**MSRP: \$999** | [Buy Now](#)



## Highend 5.1 Speaker Set

### High End Pick: RSL CG24 5.1 Surround System | [Preview](#)

Don't let their relatively small size fool you. These RSL Speakers have serious build quality and weight and boy do they ever deliver the sonic goods. Their smaller footprint makes them ideal for any number of setups—from new, custom installations to fitting into aesthetics of an existing room. The RSL CG24 setup will deliver clean, articulate, and engaging sound with plenty of weight and depth. You can always add additional speakers later on a la carte to expand the CG24 into a 7.1 or full-blown Dolby Atmos setup.

**MSRP: \$2,150** | [Buy Now](#)



## Displays

### Flat Panel TV Pick: Sony XBR-55X850B

4K/UHD sets are here to stay and manufacturers are taking every opportunity to charge a premium for them. The Sony XBR-55X850 is only a 55" display, but it hits the sweet spot in the size/ price/performance ratio. With HDMI 2.0 and HDCP 2.2, you'll be able to feed native 4K content to this display. The Sony also features HEVC so that you can watch 4K streaming content from Netflix and Amazon Prime. It's only an edge lit display but will still deliver decent picture quality. This set was originally released at the \$3,000 price-point but can now be found at half that price for around \$1,500. You'll be hard-pressed to find a better bargain for a 4K TV in the under \$2,000 price-range.

**MSRP: \$3,000** | [Buy Now](#)



### Flat Panel 4K/UHD TV Pick: LG 65EG9600 65" OLED 4K/UHD TV

For the past decade, Plasma has been our gold-standard for the best active display technology. OLED displays promise to take the best features of plasma to a whole new level of awesome. Last year's OLED displays were small and still limited to 1080p but LG's new 65" 4K OLED is an awesome performer. While OLED displays still command a premium, if you have the funds and are looking for the best 4K display that you can buy, then look no further than LG's OLED.

**MSRP: \$8,999** | [Buy Now](#)





### Front Projection Pick: Epson Pro Cinema 6030UB LCD Projector | [Preview](#)

We got a chance to interview Jason Palmer of Epson about their new Pro Cinema 6030UB LCD projector, which is the company's flagship home theater model for the custom installation channel. This replaces the Pro Cinema 6020UB (many of us still use this model in our own reference systems). The major improvements are contrast ratio, which is almost double. It was 320,000:1 and is now 600,000:1. There are also a lot of under-the-hood features that have been improved—particularly lens and processing improvements. The 6030UB can also do frame interpolation in 3D mode, and has a Classic Black and White mode, which sets the color temperature to 5400K, the way film cameras used to be back in the day. Although we don't have a full review posted yet, our experience at CEDIA with the 6030UB and in-home with the 6020UB, makes us confident in including this projector in our list of top picks.



**MSRP: \$3,499** | [Buy Now](#)

## Cables

### Our Pick: Blue Jeans Cable

Here at Audioholics, we're not fans of high priced, snake oil infused cables. Conversely, we would never suggest that you buy bottom of the barrel, marginal junk. All we ask for is top quality cabling at a reasonable price, without a side of BS. Fortunately, the folks at Blue Jeans Cable have heeded this call. Using top quality cable stock from companies like Belden and Canare, Blue Jeans Cable offers you some of the best cable money can buy at a price that isn't in the stratosphere. Offering a collection of A/V and data cables, they're the Audioholics' first stop for wire.

**MSRP: Varies** | [Buy Now](#)



## HDMI

### Our Pick: Monoprice Redmere 18Gbps Ultra Slim Series | [Preview](#)

With 4K/UHD TV sets hitting the shelves it's important to make sure that your HDMI cables can support the increased bandwidth required to deliver 4K/UHD content. Don't get caught up in marketing hype and spend unnecessary dollars on HDMI cables. Our top pick HDMI cables are Monoprice's Redmere Ultra Slim series cables. These cables are certified to deliver 4K/UHD content, flexible, and are almost as thin as an iPhone charger, making them practical for a variety of installations. They come in a variety of colors and sizes up to 15 feet. Because these are active cables, they are directional, which means that one end needs to be plugged into the source and the other end to the display.

**MSRP: Varies** | [Buy Now](#)

