

**Salamander Designs Ltd.
Synergy System
A/V Furniture**

Price: \$249 and up

Ready-to-assemble (RTA) furniture has suffered a bad rap through the years thanks to shoddy \$399 A/V centers made from cheap particle boards slather in cheesy wood-grain vinyl. Salamander Designs is attempting to undo that damage by using top-notch materials in clever, modular systems that ship flat and slap together easily.



The Synergy system provides incredible design flexibility in a high-quality and easy-to-assemble package.

The Synergy system is based on a series of open air equipment racks that are all 23 1/4 inches wide, 19 3/4 inches deep, and (without wheels or feet) 20, 30, 40 inches high. Each rack uses extruded-aluminum corner post (black or brushed) with internal channels that support hardware for the shelves and the optional side/rear panels and doors. Top and base shelves are solid MDF with furniture-grade cherry, walnut, or black wood-veneer finish, support 250 pounds. Inner shelves are black

wood and support 150 or 250 pounds depending on the type and hardware; acoustic-isolation points or neoprene damping are available. Side panels come black, cherry, a suede-like synthetic brown leather, or black perforated steel. Doors come in same black perforated steel or frosted glass. Polished-aluminum claw-style feet or saturn wheel casters are also optional, as are large, 35 inch-wide top shelves to support a TV, and massive media drawer that hold up to 100 pounds.

Endless variations of the basic racks in height can be joined at the sides or stacked to make towers. Extra 35-inch top shelves and pillars can be added to create bridges or peninsulas that hold a TV or function as desk space. Get the picture? Furniture a la carte, so to speak.

THE LONG

I've been searching endlessly for a pair of compact, attractive equipment cabinets that would function as end tables and have door to hide the gear. The incredible flexibility of the Synergy system allowed me to customize just that. The unit I requested for evaluation was a Synergy 20 with

walnut top and base, black aluminum supports, black perf sides, a cherry door with black perf panel, and casters; this decked-out configuration retains for about \$556. My test model came assembled, so I took it apart and easily rebuilt it in less than 15 minutes using the two supplies Allen keys and open-ended wrench; this is a simple, elegant design.

Parts quality was excellent. The aluminum support posts were very strong, the walnut top and base were heavy and classy enough to demand a coaster under my drink, and the stainless steel casters and black perf worked with the wood to give the minirack a kind of retro-modern look. The construction unit had solid mass to it and was highly practical. After I decided on the height for my one adjustable shelf, I locked in the sliding supports with an Allen key and slipped in my receiver and LD player from behind. The cables emerged from open space above and below the removable rear panel. The perf sides and door provided ventilation and passage for infrared remote signals, and the casters were a godsend for working behind the rack.

THE SHORT

At these prices you expect quality, and while Synergy delivers, it can't help but betray its RTA roots in some spots. The modular nature of the design and the choice of materials, for example, require that the high-quality flathead Allen bolts that hold the top shelf to the pillars remain visible.

THE VERDICT

On the whole, these are minor nits to pick with a rack system that addresses a remarkable range of needs, delivers solid build quality, and offers an alternative to the me-too black steel and glass Euro design that's prominent today. If you've got special requirements or simply want something that's different and well-engineered, this is the furniture that's hard to beat.

-Rob Sabin

summer 98 buyer's guide