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E Q U I P M E N T R E P O R T

Audio Accessories: Salamander Archetype audio racks

Wes Phillips

I'm not really a House Beautiful kind of guy. My basic decorating technique consists of piling stuff on top of other stuff- you can tell I've cleaned house when the piles are in some sort of order. And although I'm confessing to a violation of postal codes here, I have to admit that I tend to make heavy use of mail tubs, when available- it makes moving the piles around so much easier.

But I do have some standards. I don't stack my stereo on just any pile of books that's lying around. I prefer to place it on a stereo rack, the better to route the cables so that signal-carrying interconnects don't lie willy-nilly across power cords. Strange, huh?

The problem is, most equipment racks come in one of two flavors: rigid and inflexible, or massive and

unstable. Oh yeah, and most all of them are ugly. (If you're wondering why someone whose idea of decor is "organized piling" even cares about how ugly audio furniture is, I reiterate - I do have some standards. And I don't want to live in a laboratory, thank you very much.)

That's why I was happy to discover Archetype Audio Racks by Salamander Designs. They have shelves in a variety of wood finishes, including a lovely cherry. They're modular, so you can reconfigure them as your system changes, which mine does fairly regularly. And Salamander has raft-load of convenient accessories, such as spikes, dual-wheel casters, desk-tops, and my favorite: accessory drawers.

The basic design is familiar one by now. Each rack is constructed around four 5/8" threaded rods. You connect shelves to these legs by threading large nuts into position on them and then inserting the rods into holes drilled into the shelves. Here's how it goes: 1) large nut; 2) metal fender-washer; 3) squishy Neoprene washer; 4) shelf; 5) squishy Neoprene washer; 6) metal fender-washer; 7) large nut. Level the shelf, tighten the nuts, repeat as necessary.

Of course, if you tighten the nut too much, you lose some of the Neoprene washer's damping properties. But if you don't cinch everything down pretty solid, the shelf goes all wobbly on you. You need

to decide which direction to compromise in. I choose rigidity every time, but even then, the taller stands tend to be a little rickety.

For perfect vibration control, you are better off with a welded stand, but they have drawbacks too-the inductance of all that steel can affect your signal-carrying cables if you don't watch where you route them. And no matter how carefully you plan for future, you know that there will be new equipment that requires additional shelves. A DAD player, for example. Or an outboard processor. Being an audiophile means you're bound to need something else...

But with the Salamander racks? Buy a new component, add another shelf. You upgrade that CD player with an outboard power supply? Add another shelf. Or join two racks together with horizontal video bridge. The possibilities a staggering.

They really are. This whole convenience idea isn't just limited to hi-fi. I've got Salamander racks masquerading as real furniture. My big ol' desk uses a 28" Salamander rack as the support for one corner-it gives me a place to put my printer, uninterruptible power supply, paper files, and NAD 310 integrated amp I run my soundcard through. My credenza is Salamander's desktop module. I'm going to order a couple of the 28"-tall Archetype 3.0 units as night tables, which ought to eliminate about three piles' worth of



Salamander's Archetype audio racks

books a magazines cluttering my side of the bed. Tom Norton just got great price from Damark on three laser-levels for himself, John Atkinson, and me, so my audio toolkit continues to grow at an alarming pace. Maybe I'll order another 3.0 outfitted with accessory drawers to house it conveniently next to my system.

I even use 'em for purpose for which they were built. All of my video gear is now off the floor and easy to get to, front and back, thanks to a 36"-tall Archetype 5.0 five-shelf unit. The 3 1/4" MegaSpikes penetrate the carpet

and stabilize the stand on the concrete slab beneath it. Before that I used a CWD lowboy on casters, and damned if I didn't get both a clearer and more stable picture out of my LD player as a result of the change. And since I'm an audiophile, I'm sure I noticed a difference in the sound. Yeah! I must've- I changed something, it had to make a difference. (Actually, I changed speakers when I installed the rack, so it wasn't a rigorous comparison; but the improvement in laserdisc video quality sure wasn't subtle.)

You might think I'm being silly when I suggest all of these uses for

the Salamander Archetype stands. I'm not. I went out last week to price some modular Elfa wire storage units, and Ay yi yi!- found out what can make an audiophile who's grown blase about cable prices blanch: furniture prices! Compared to that, the prices Salamander is asking seem pretty darn reasonable. So if you drop in on me, don't be surprised to find I've furnished my house entirely with the stuff. If only they'd make a comfy chair for my sweet spot..

Wes Phillips
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Salamander Designs LTD.

30 Arbor Street • Hartford, Connecticut 06106 Phone: 860 313 0525 • Fax 860 313 0526