

**DNA**  
DONALD NORTH AUDIO

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Robb Report  
**HOME ENTERTAINMENT**

# OUT OF NOWHERE

*DNA's Sonic Décor model 100 on-wall speaker proves a micro-company can engineer a paradigm shift.*

Starting a speaker company is easy, for the most part. Computer programs can practically design the speaker for you, and scores of companies stand ready to manufacture it for you at a reasonable price. The only challenge is coming up with a design that dealers will want to sell and consumers will want to buy.

Of course, few start-ups prove capable of that latter task. But I just found one of the rare exceptions: DNA, which stands for Donald North Audio. DNA's first product was the Sequence, an exotic contraption intended for devoted audiophiles. Its second product, though, is the most appealing, most original—and when you get right down to it, the cutest—on-wall speaker I have yet encountered. It represents a stunning change in direction, like a boutique builder of F1 racing cars suddenly introducing a perfectly executed luxury sedan.

When I first see the DNA Sonic Décor model 100 at GNP Audio Video in Pasadena, Calif., I'm shocked that such an elegant, cleanly executed design could have emerged from a company and an engineer I've never before encountered. But DNA didn't really come from nowhere—the company's namesake is a CalTech-educated engineer who has worked for Boston Acoustics, AuraSound, and Harman International.

The Sonic Décor model 100 looks like a small, two-way bookshelf-type speaker that was run over by a perfectly executed luxury sedan. It's only 4.25 inches deep, which is about the same depth as a typical flat-panel TV set. What strikes you about it initially is the unprecedented array of stock colors and finishes. The speaker's façade is a snap-on, .25-inch-thick panel, available in six colors of acrylic and four wood finishes, and also in smooth-sanded MDF (medium-density fiberboard) for custom painting. The fabric grille comes in black, light gray, and white, and the cabinet is available in black or white. That amounts to 60 different stock color combinations, a selection that leaves other speakers looking like they were designed in East Berlin before the wall came down.

The woofer and tweeter are sourced from Peerless and Vifa, respectively, both Danish brands used in many high-end speakers. The cabinet is surprisingly well-crafted for a product from a start-up—and even more surprisingly, is built in a Southern California factory. No kludgy, complicated hardware is needed to hang the speaker; a simple metal clip attaches to the wall with two supplied wall anchors to support each 13-pound speaker.

A model 200 center speaker is also available. It's essentially a model 100 turned on its side with its drivers reoriented. The only

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH



Faceplates made from wood, acrylic, or paintable medium-density fiberboard (top) give DNA's customers an unprecedented array of stock color and finish schemes. The model 200 center speaker (directly above) is a model 100 reconfigured with a horizontal cabinet.

difference between the two, engineering-wise, is that the magnet structure of the model 200's woofer is altered slightly to fit in the speaker's shorter cabinet.

Although it's widely known that mounting

speakers on a wall causes a bump in the bass response and some cancellations in the midrange, many speaker designers address these problems inadequately or not at all. North, however, has taken great pains in his speakers' internal circuitry to compensate for these flaws. He states that his speakers produce an almost perfectly even frequency response when placed against a wall—and he shows me measurement graphs that support his claim. My experience with the speakers also

provides ample confirmation of their performance.

The model 100 sounds like the little pair of mini-monitor speakers so many audiophiles fall in love with when they first get into audio. The sound is refreshingly smooth, subtle, and detailed; I doubt anyone, in a blind test, could tell these are on-walls. Many on-wall speakers sound somewhat bloated when conveying male voices, because the nearby wall reinforces the upper bass. But the model 100 never does, even when I play a recording of Hawaiian singer/guitarist Reverend Dennis Kamakahi that sounds bloated on most of the speakers I test.

The stereo imaging is excellent, embodying singers and instruments precisely between (and even a little to the outside of) the speaker pair. But a lot of on-walls can do that. What's more interesting is that the model 100 produces a wraparound sound that is uncharacteristic of its genre—and more impressive than what I have heard even from some free-standing speakers.

The bass is satisfying for such a small speaker; it never sounds thin except when I play hip-hop-type mixes that use only deep, deep, deep bass with no upper bass. Mind you, it's no party speaker; raucous fare like Mötley Crüe's "Kickstart My Heart" sounds strained when cranked up to the levels I prefer. A subwoofer, of course, would help.

For now, the DNA line is available at only a handful



*The model 100 and model 200 offer spring-loaded metal binding posts—our favorite for on-walls because they make for easy, secure speaker cable connections.*

of dealers in North America; North will sell direct if there's no dealer near you. But I expect that situation to change after North exhibits them at the CEDIA Expo this September. And I expect these lovely little speakers to find a home alongside many plasma and LCD TVs, and even in quite a few audiophiles' music systems. [HE](#)

#### DESCRIPTION

On-wall speakers for stereo or home theater use, including model 100 for left/right/surround use, and model 200 for center channel

#### COMPONENTS

5.75-inch Nomex paper cone woofer, 1-inch fabric-dome tweeter

#### CONNECTIONS

Push-type spring-loaded metal binding posts

#### DIMENSIONS

**model 100:** 16.25 x 10.5 x 4.25 inches (hwd)

**model 200:** 10.5 x 16.25 x 4.25 inches (hwd)

#### PRICE/CONTACT

**PRICE:** model 100 \$1,495 per pair, model 200 \$795 each

**CONTACT:** 310.869.6214, dnaudio.com