

Harbeth Updates a Classic Sterophile Jan. 2009

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The diminutive Harbeth HL-P3 has been one of this magazine's consistently recommended speakers since we first [reviewed it](#) in 1993. While some details have been improved over the years (and been reported on in the magazine), its design has remained consistent over the years: a diminutive two-way stand-mount intended to take the place of the classic [BBC-designed LS3/5a](#) for location monitoring and for audiophiles with small rooms who value midrange purity and superbly stable, well-defined stereo imaging over bass extension and ultimate loudness capability.

Nothing lasts forever, however, and at T.H.E. Show, Harbeth was showing off a major redesign of the speaker, the HL-P3R, which will be in production the second quarter of the year. The SEAS tweeter is unchanged, but the woofer had to be changed, due to SEAS discontinuing the original's driver. The new woofer uses Harbeth's proprietary "Radial" polymer cone material first seen in the [M40i](#). Using a new woofer led to a crossover revision, while the cabinet now has a bolted-in rear panel. Unlike the original, biwirable HL-P3, the "R" has a single pair of terminals.

Harbeth owner Alan Shaw, shown here holding his new baby, told me that a design goal was to match the low-frequency response and tuning of the earlier speaker, which was always a little more extended than the LS3/5a. The last version of the HL-P3 cost \$1950–\$2459/pair, depending on finish; the HL-P3R will have a "marginal" price increase, said Shaw.

Note, by the way, the little doohickey on the wall to Alan's left. That's one of the Synergistic ART devices. Alan remained agnostic about the effect when I commented on his using them—"They came with the Synergistic cables we borrowed for the Show"—but I took part in an A/B tests in another room at CES where darned if I didn't hear an improvement when the tiny Synergistic devices were brought into the room and a degradation when they were removed. Yikes!