

# Tweek Geek

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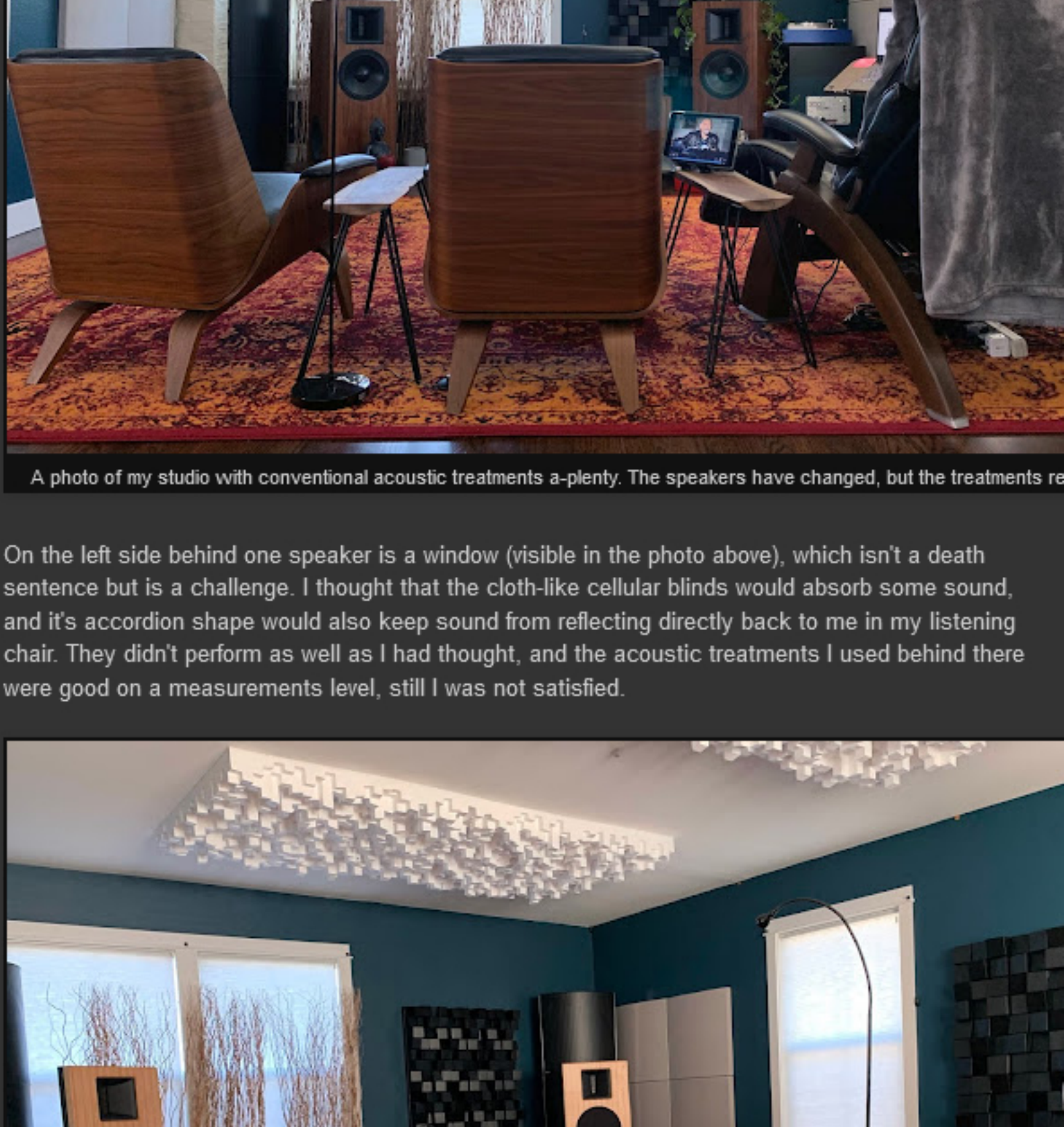
Wednesday, September 18, 2019

## Acoustics: Not All Treatments Are Equal. My Experience With The Stillpoints Aperture II's

If you've been following my blog, you are aware of my new studio and the fact that I have been working on my studio's acoustics. I am on round 2 of this adventure after not being thrilled with the results of the first round. I will admit, my needs and room is not super easy. I have open baffle speakers (Spatial Audio X3's), they need room to do their dipole thing, and are a little more sensitive than average to the surfaces behind them.

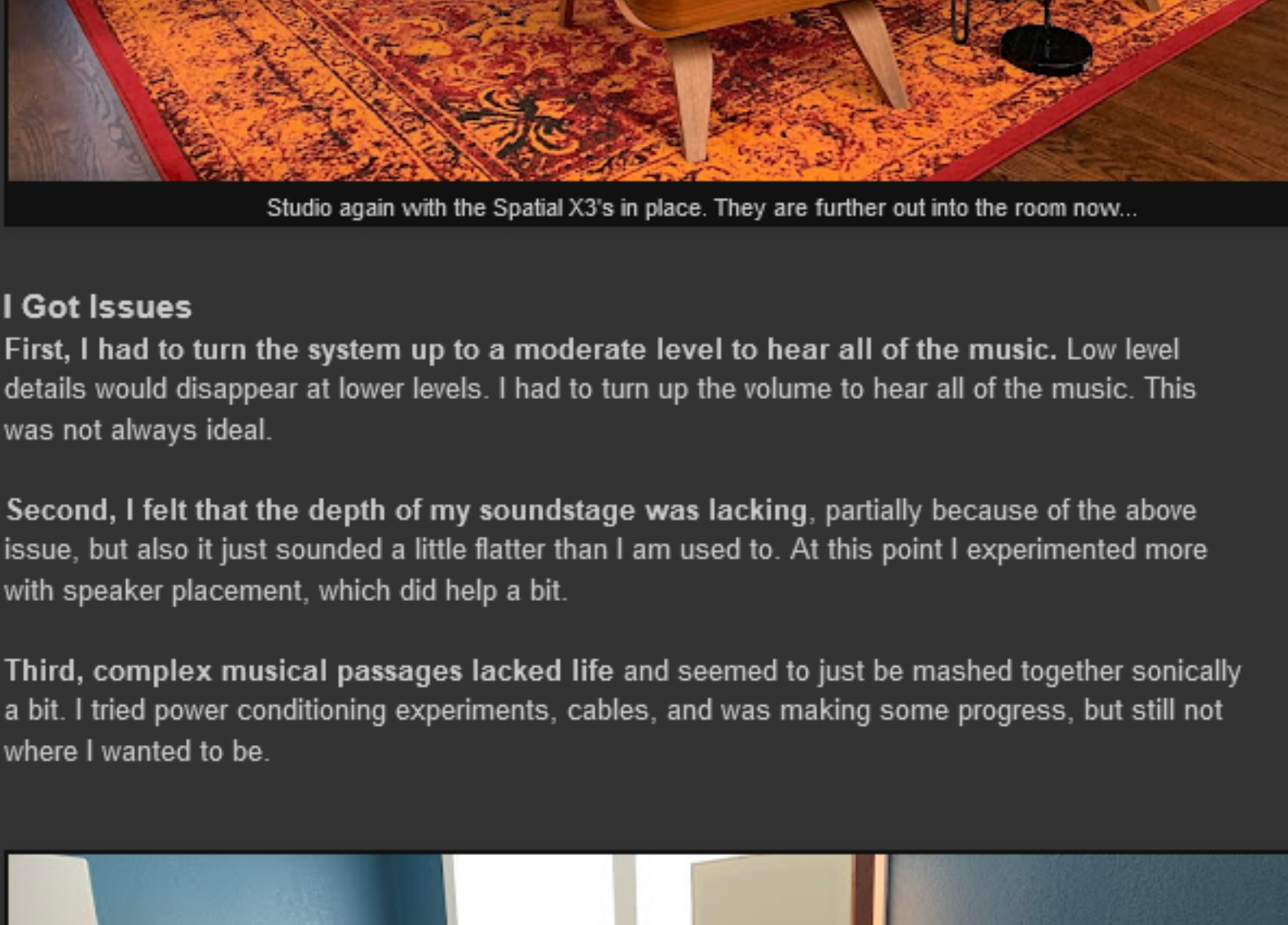
Over the last few months I have been working on these issues from other troubleshooting angles: Power conditioning, speaker placement, cables, and tweaks. I have been making really good progress, and I have detailed some of it on previous posts.

The latest breakthrough was born out of my being bored, unsatisfied with the sound, and wanting to experiment. I had four [Stillpoints Aperture II](#) acoustic panels in storage for the occasional in-home audition and decided to place them in the area behind my speakers.



A photo of my studio with conventional acoustic treatments a-plenty. The speakers have changed, but the treatments remain.

On the left side behind one speaker is a window (visible in the photo above), which isn't a death sentence but is a challenge. I thought that the cloth-like cellular blinds would absorb some sound, and its accordion shape would also keep sound from reflecting directly back to me in my listening chair. They didn't perform as well as I had thought, and the acoustic treatments I used behind there were good on a measurements level, still I was not satisfied.



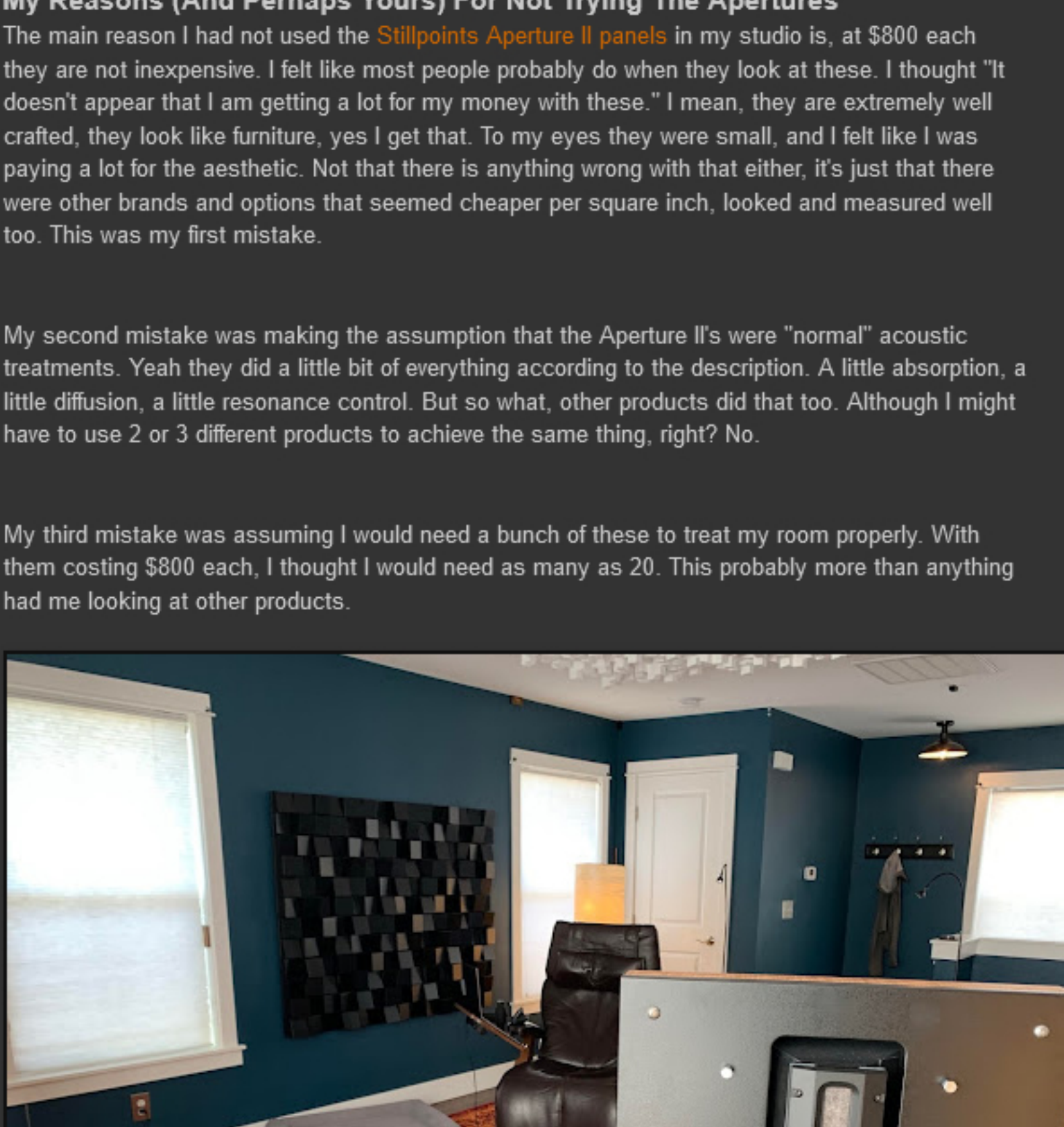
Studio again with the Spatial X3's in place. They are further out into the room now...

### I Got Issues

First, I had to turn the system up to a moderate level to hear all of the music. Low level details would disappear at lower levels. I had to turn up the volume to hear all of the music. This was not always ideal.

Second, I felt that the depth of my soundstage was lacking, partially because of the above issue, but also it just sounded a little flatter than I am used to. At this point I experimented more with speaker placement, which did help a bit.

Third, complex musical passages lacked life and seemed to just be mashed together sonically a bit. I tried power conditioning experiments, cables, and was making some progress, but still not where I wanted to be.



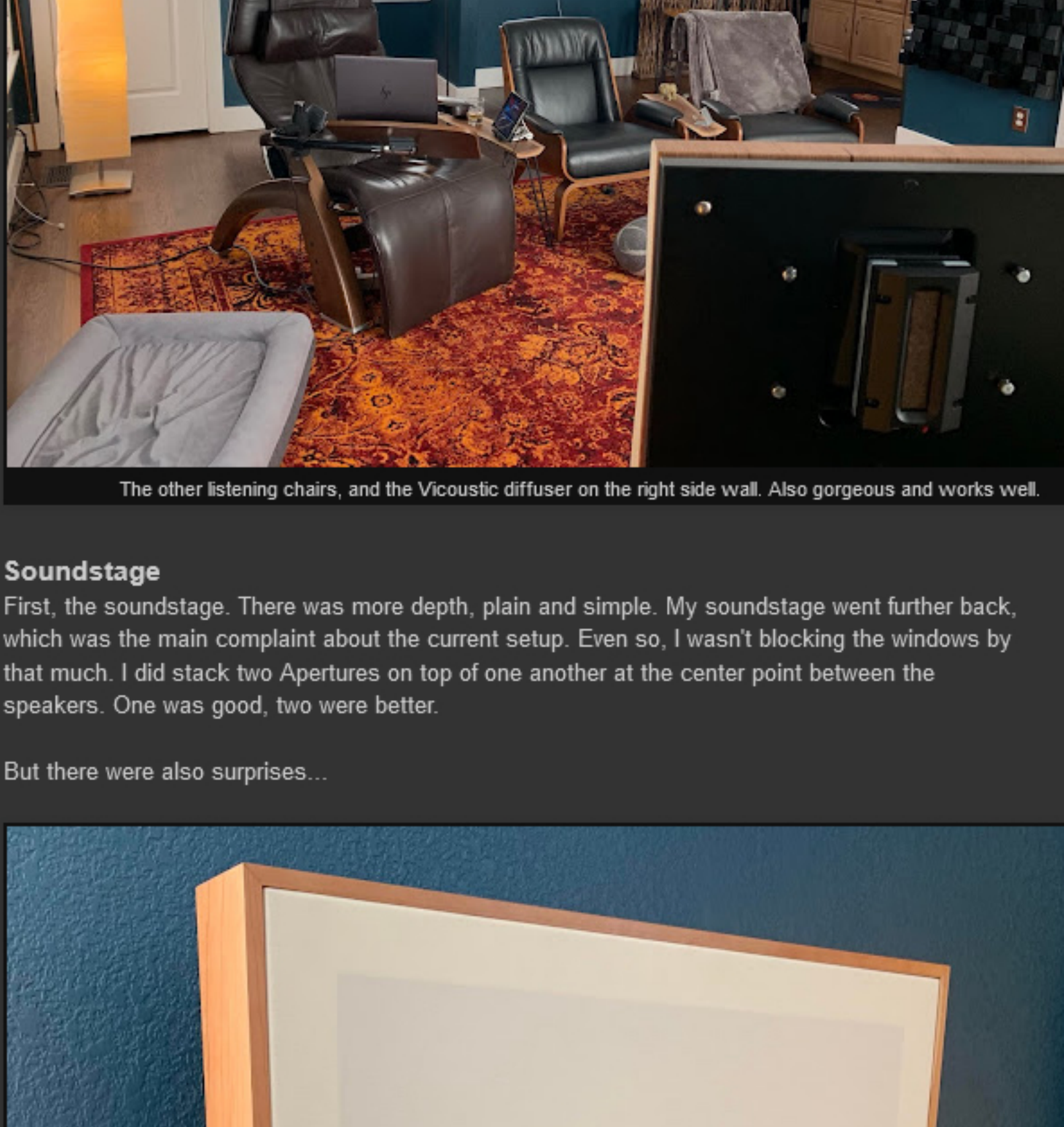
Spatial X3's have found their place, as have the Stillpoints Apertures. Now to build stands that I like...

### My Reasons (And Perhaps Yours) For Not Trying The Apertures

The main reason I had not used the [Stillpoints Aperture II](#) panels in my studio is, at \$800 each they are not inexpensive. I felt like most people probably do when they look at these. I thought "It doesn't appear that I am getting a lot for my money with these." I mean, they are extremely well crafted, they look like furniture, yes I get that. To my eyes they were small, and I felt like I was paying a lot for the aesthetic. Not that there is anything wrong with that either, it's just that there were other brands and options that seemed cheaper per square inch, looked and measured well too. This was my first mistake.

My second mistake was making the assumption that the Aperture II's were "normal" acoustic treatments. Yeah they did a little bit of everything according to the description. A little absorption, a little diffusion, a little resonance control. But so what, other products did that too. Although I might have to use 2 or 3 different products to achieve the same thing, right? No.

My third mistake was assuming I would need a bunch of these to treat my room properly. With them costing \$800 each, I thought I would need as many as 20. This probably more than anything had me looking at other products.



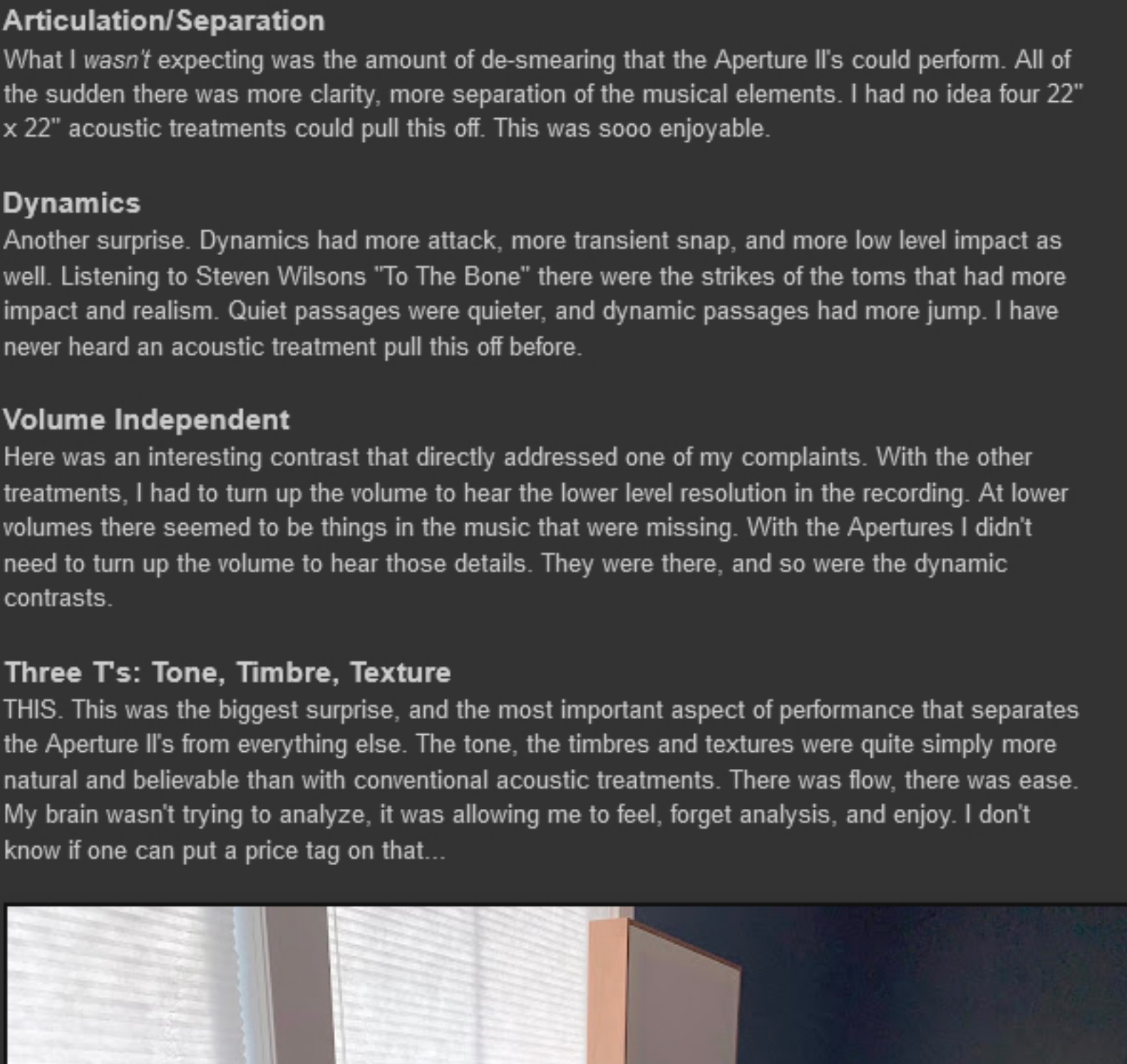
Back side of the Spatial X3 and my work chair. Beside the chair is a Vicoustic diffuser (it's gorgeous and works well).

### The Reality Of The Stillpoints Aperture II's

Placing just 3 panels behind my speakers, propped up about 24" off the ground allowed for coverage of the panels, and put the Aperture II's in the line of fire of the dipole midrange and high frequency drivers of the Spatial X3's.

This. Was. Eye. Opening. Hooo Lee Shit. What just happened to the sound?

I'll tell you what happened. Magic.

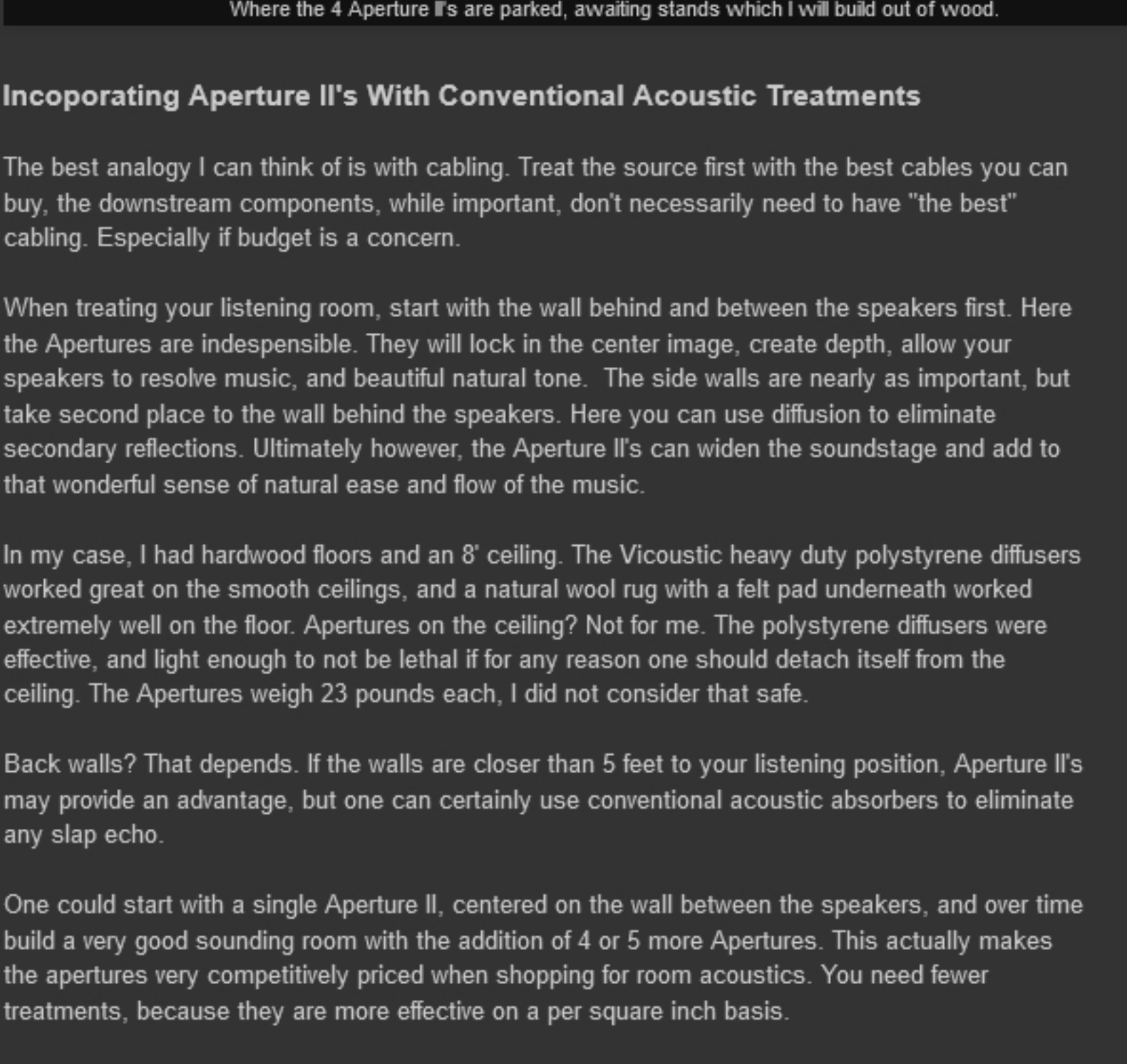


The other listening chairs, and the Vicoustic diffuser on the right side wall. Also gorgeous and works well.

### Soundstage

Another surprise. There was more depth, plain and simple. My soundstage went further back, which was the main complaint about the current setup. Even so, I wasn't blocking the windows by that much. I did stack two Apertures on top of one another at the center point between the speakers. One was good, two were better.

But there were also surprises...



Aperture II in Cherry wood with a cream grill. A very cool, retro kind of coloring and look. Love it.

### Articulation/Separation

What I *wasn't* expecting was the amount of de-smearing that the Aperture II's could perform. All of the sudden there was more clarity, more separation of the musical elements. I had no idea four 22" x 22" acoustic treatments could pull this off. This was sooo enjoyable.

### Dynamics

Another surprise. Dynamics had more attack, more transient snap, and more low level impact as well. Listening to Steven Wilson's "To The Bone" there were passages of the music that had more impact and realism. Quiet passages were quieter, and dynamic strikes had more jump. I have never heard an acoustic treatment pull this off before.

### Volume Independent

Here was an interesting contrast that directly addressed one of my complaints. With the other treatments, I had to turn up the volume to hear the lower level resolution in the recording. At lower volumes there seemed to be things in the music that were missing. With the Apertures I didn't need to turn up the volume to hear those details. They were there, and so were the dynamic contrasts.

### Three T's: Tone, Timbre, Texture

THIS. This was the biggest surprise, and the most important aspect of performance that separates the Aperture II's from everything else. The tone, the timbres and textures were quite simply more natural and believable than with conventional acoustic treatments. There was flow, there was ease. My brain wasn't trying to analyze, it was allowing me to feel, forget analysis, and enjoy. I don't know if one can put a price tag on that...



Where the 4 Aperture II's are parked, awaiting stands which I will build out of wood.

### Incorporating Aperture II's With Conventional Acoustic Treatments

The best analogy I can think of is with cabling. Treat the source first with the best cables you can buy, the downstream components, while important, don't necessarily need to have "the best" cabling. Especially if budget is a concern.

When treating your listening room, start with the wall behind and between the speakers first. Here the Apertures are indispensable. They will lock in the center image, create depth, allow your speakers to resolve music, and beautiful natural tone. The side walls are nearly as important, but take second place to the wall behind the speakers. Here you can use diffusion to eliminate secondary reflections. Ultimately however, the Aperture II's can widen the soundstage and add to that wonderful sense of natural ease and flow of the music.

In my case, I had hardwood floors and an 8' ceiling. The Vicoustic heavy duty polystyrene diffusers worked great on the smooth ceilings, and a natural wool rug with a felt pad underneath worked extremely well on the floor. Apertures on the ceiling? Not for me. The polystyrene diffusers were effective, and light enough to not be lethal if for any reason one should detach itself from the ceiling. The Apertures weigh 23 pounds each, I did not consider that safe.

Back walls? That depends. If the walls are closer than 5 feet to your listening position, Aperture II's may provide an advantage, but one can certainly use conventional acoustic absorbers to eliminate any slap echo.

One could start with a single Aperture II, centered on the wall between the speakers, and over time build a very good sounding room with the addition of 4 or 5 more Apertures. This actually makes the apertures very competitively priced when shopping for room acoustics. You need fewer treatments, because they are more effective on a per square inch basis.

### Conclusions

Not all acoustic treatments are equal. The Aperture II's while small are way better in getting one's system to sound fantastic in their room. Their "potency" allows one to save one money on treating a room because fewer Aperture II's are needed than conventional diffusers and absorbers. Additionally, since fewer Aperture II's are needed, one has more wall space to hang art. It's a win-win!

Seriously though, I had spend a chunk of money on more traditional acoustic treatments, and they simply did not allow my system to reproduce the music as well in my room. That was an expensive lesson. I share this information with you so you don't make the same mistakes.

The Aperture II's are a superior product worthy of the asking price.

