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- PIONEER Plasma
- SONY LCD
- PHILIPS Plasma
- MAXENT LCD

THE GREEN
ISSUE

- How to Recycle Gear
- Save Money on Electricity
- What Energy Star Does for You



Sonus faber Domus
Series Speaker System
Reviewed

Sonus faber Domus Series Speaker System

Body and soul.

curves—sheathed in supple black leatherette, poised on spiked feet—will get audio-philes all hot and bothered. That's because they make for pretty sexy sound, too.

Franco Serblin founded Sonus faber in 1983 in Vicenza, Italy, to craft speakers that *played* music instead of merely reproducing it. For him, the art of speaker and musical-instrument design has everything to do with controlling resonance. Think about it: The sound of a guitar, violin, or any stringed instrument is generated within a carefully tuned

resonating acoustic chamber. That concept inspired the form and function of Serblin's designs, which synthesize the best of old-world craftsmanship with finely tuned technology.

Sonus faber has historically christened their speaker models after venerated musical-instrument makers—Stradivari, Amati, and Guarneri—but the Domus moniker comes from Latin, meaning a private family residence of modest to palatial proportions. The line includes the svelte Wall Domus wall-mount model, the Concertino Domus bookshelf speaker, the Center Domus, the Concerto floorstanding speaker, and the magnificent Grand Piano Domus tower speaker. The lute-shaped designs bear a striking resemblance to the company's Cremonas (\$8,995 per pair) and the new Amati Anniversarios (\$27,500 per pair).

Sonus faber has derived the Domus Series' ring-radiator-type tweeter from the one used in the Cremona speakers. The woofers and midrange drivers also benefit from trickle-down technology—the vented phase plug (that's the silver bullet-shaped part in the center) was originally designed for the Stradivari speaker. Faux leather completely covers each Domus speaker's front, top, rear, and bottom surfaces. It not only looks and feels nice, the leatherette's grain is said to minimize surface diffraction, and the material also serves as a sealing gasket for the drivers. Decoupled teak wood or

BY STEVE GUTTENBERG

I don't think I've ever before referred to a speaker as "sexy," but Sonus faber's new Domus line is definitely hot stuff. Yeah baby, the Domus Series' enticing

curved high-gloss-black side panels suppress cabinet resonance and serve to goose the Domus' ogle factor up a couple of notches. All of the Domus models feature ported designs and come fitted with high-quality binding posts.

Sonus faber offers optional floor stands for the Concertino and the Center speakers that mirror the Domus' curves and are as beautifully constructed as the speakers. The Wall Domus comes with a custom bracket that allows for 30 degrees of arc adjustment with the speaker mounted on the wall or the ceiling. The Grand Piano model sits on a stabilizing base outfitted with spiked feet.

Improving My Fluency in Italian

For this review, I stuck with my Pioneer DV-45A DVD player, Sunfire Theater Grand III surround processor, Ayre V-6x power amp, and REL Britannia B2 subwoofer; all were wired with a combination of Monster Cable and Analysis Plus' Silver Oval cables. After a few days of moving the speakers to and fro, I wound up placing the Grand Piano towers a foot further out into the room and much wider apart from each other than my standard positioning. The sound wasn't bad in the normal spots, but the Domus really appreciated the extra breathing room. The Grand Pianos definitely wanted to be angled in, firing directly toward the sweet spot. Viewed from the side, you can adjust the tower's front-baffle rake angle via its floor spikes—and, once I had everything perfectly tweaked, the Grand Pianos' image height and focus were considerably more lifelike than what I'm used to. The Center Domus perched on Sonus faber's floor stand, angled up to

focus on the primary listening position. I used a set of stand-mounted Concertinos as surround speakers, situated out to the sides of my home

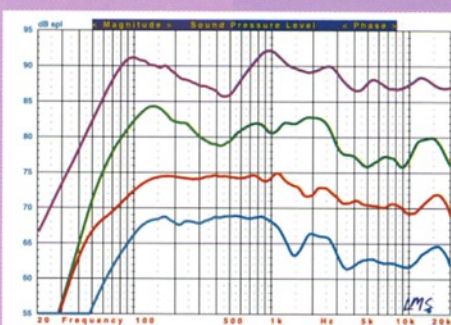
theater. (They can also serve as front speakers.) If your experiences are anything like mine, you may have to work a little to get the

AT A GLANCE SONUS FABER DOMUS SERIES SPEAKER SYSTEM

These listings are based on the manufacturer's stated specs; the HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

SPEAKER	Grand Piano Domus	Center Domus	Concertino Domus	Wall Domus
Type:	Three-way tower	Three-way center channel	Two-way bookshelf	Two-way on-wall or on-ceiling
Tweeter (size in inches, type):	1, ring radiator	0.75, ring radiator	0.75, ring radiator	0.75, ring radiator
Midrange (size in inches, type):	6, coated paper cone	3.25, coated paper cone	None	None
Woofer (size, type):	7, coated paper cone (2)	6, coated paper cone (2)	6, coated paper cone	6, coated paper cone
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	4	4	4	4
Recommended Amp Power (watts):	30–200	30–200	30–150	30–150
Available Finishes:	Black Leatherette/Teak, Piano Black Lacquer	Black Leatherette/Teak, Piano Black Lacquer	Black Leatherette/Teak, Piano Black Lacquer	Black Leatherette/Teak, Piano Black Lacquer
Dimensions (H x W x D):	11.75 x 8.25 x 12.25	17.25 x 24.25 x 12.6	25.6 x 15 x 12.6	7.1 x 7.25 x 19
Weight (pounds):	57.38	18.7	13.2	12.12
Price:	\$4,795/pair	\$1,295	\$1,495/pair	\$1,495/pair

HT Labs Measures: Sonus faber Domus Series Speaker System



- L/R Sensitivity: 90 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz
- Center Sensitivity: 88.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz
- Surround Sensitivity: 88 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz
- Wall Surround Sensitivity: 88 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Domus Grand Piano L/R (purple trace), Domus Center center channel (green trace), Domus Concertino surround (red trace), and Domus Wall surround (blue

trace). All loudspeakers were measured with grilles at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

The Domus Grand Piano's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +2.19/-4.30 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 65 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 54 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.36 ohms at 112 Hz and a phase angle of +24.34 degrees at 1.1 kHz.

The Domus Center's listening-window response measures +1.32/-5.67 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +1.21/-6.55 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 73 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 61 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.48 ohms at 865 Hz and a phase angle of -39.01 degrees at 98 Hz.

The Domus Concertino's listening-window response measures +0.90/-4.72 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 84 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 64 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.90 ohms at 20 kHz and a phase angle of -55.24 degrees at 2.9 kHz.

The Domus Wall's listening-window response measures +1.81/-5.70 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 84 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 67 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.89 ohms at 20 kHz and a phase angle of -46.50 degrees at 136 Hz. —MJP

most out of these speakers, but the extra effort will pay huge dividends—they're that good. The speakers' sound also benefited from extended breaking-in.

Spellbound!

The Domus sound is flavorful and three-dimensionally solid, with a luscious and full-bodied low end. When I played a bunch of Miles Davis CDs, the speakers projected a vast soundstage populated with living musicians. The Domus speakers let the horns sound brassy, the stand-up bass was big and woody, and the drums had plenty of snap. A superb new recording of boogie-woogie piano, *Rockin' the Spirit*, put the speakers to the test, and they reproduced the scale and dynamic of its namesake. OK, the Grand Piano speakers couldn't quite pull off that feat (no speaker can), but their production of piano sound was well above par.

The Westminster Choir's recordings were absolutely spectacular; on *Like as a Hart*, I could easily follow each individual singer's voice within the St. Ignatius Loyola church's vast acoustic space. The sound arising from just the two Grand Piano Domus speakers was utterly holographic. I can't imagine how a surround recording

could have possibly added to the sound's believability.

In the end, I felt that the Domus speakers were balanced a tad richer than reality, but that warmth serves to flatter dialogue and vocal tonality. If you get a chance to hear these speakers, try to spend at least a little time with Norah Jones' *Come Away With Me* CD or, better yet, the SACD. I got goose bumps listening to the title track and "Seven Years."

I've always loved the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, but the DVD-Audio's surround mix sounds a little contrived. For some reason, when I played it through the Domus speakers, I had a change of heart. The surround mixes snapped into focus, and the Boys' soaring harmonies were to die for. Fully convinced of the Domus system's musicality, I was more than a little curious to see how the magic would translate to home theater.

The speakers' dynamic range and crisp articulation of detail were on full display during the extended plane-crash scene from *Flight of the Phoenix*. The fearsome impact managed to shake, rattle, and roll the contents of my home theater. I then played the now-famous dance/drum scene with Ziyi Zhang from *House of Flying Daggers*, and they just sat there with their mouths

HIGHLIGHTS

- Voluptuous styling
- Sumptuously balanced, if not neutral, sound
- Yummy leatherette cladding

agape, taking in the experience. Yeah, I probably played the dance a little—OK, a lot—louder than I should have. But each solid thwack on the drum, followed by its resonant boom, was just so satisfying. It doesn't hurt that the scene also looks positively gorgeous, but the sound of thundering drums, each one so perfectly rendered in space, demonstrated the entire Domus ensemble's remarkable spatial coherence.

I could go on gushing about these speakers. Did I mention that they're positively gorgeous? If you're like me and find the Domus speakers' elegant proportions, sumptuous leatherette, and exquisite finish downright irresistible, just close your eyes and listen. Sure, their bravura sonics will take you in, but the Domus speakers may cross over from guilty pleasures to the realm of downright sinful abandon. 🎧

SONUS FABER DOMUS SERIES SPEAKER SYSTEM					OVERALL RATING
Build Quality	Value	Features	Performance	Ergonomics	92 Sonus faber not only makes great-sounding speakers, they also craft some of the most beautiful designs to ever grace a music system or home theater.
❖ The speakers are manufactured in Italy and made with Danish drivers custom built for Sonus faber ❖ The supple leatherette covering is a distinctive design feature	❖ This kind of old-world craftsmanship doesn't come cheap ❖ Luminous real-wood veneers or peerless piano-black lacquers ooze class	❖ Ring radiator tweeters offer a claimed response out to 40 kilohertz ❖ The speakers' midrange and bass drivers feature a unique vented phase plug	❖ These highly musical speakers can kick butt with home theater applications ❖ Tonal balance is on the rich side of neutral	❖ You may have to work a little harder than usual to bring out the best in your Domus speakers' sound, but the extra effort will be worth it ❖ The optional stands ease installation chores	
94	90	93	94	90	
General information					
Grand Piano Domus Tower Speaker, \$4,795/pair; Center Domus Center-Channel Speaker, \$1,295; Concertino Domus Bookshelf Speaker, \$1,495/pair; Wall Domus Wall-Mount Speaker, \$1,495/pair → Sumiko, (510) 843-4500, www.sumikoaudio.net → Dealer Locator Code SUM					