

# EARTH MOVERS

STEREOSTONE'S DAVINCI SPEAKER GIVES DULL GARDEN PARTIES

WHAT THEY HAVE ALWAYS NEEDED: GREAT BASS.

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN PHILLIP

**C**ontrary to what my ears are telling me, a full fleet of 18-wheelers has not convened suddenly in the driveway. "All my clients really care about is bass," the popular Los Angeles home-theater designer explains, offering an apology for the overwhelming, boomy sound of the home theater equipment he is showing me.

Truth be told, most consumers judge the quality of sound by the level of bass. That may be why rock-shaped speakers suffer such a meager reputation. Big bass

usually requires large woofers housed in voluminous speaker cabinets, and few rock speakers are endowed with either. As a result, they fail to get your toes tapping, so they often fail to impress.

StereoStone, one of the principal progenitors of rock-shaped speakers, is polishing the outdoor speaker's tarnished rep with the new DaVinci. These speakers achieve better bass output by joining a robust,

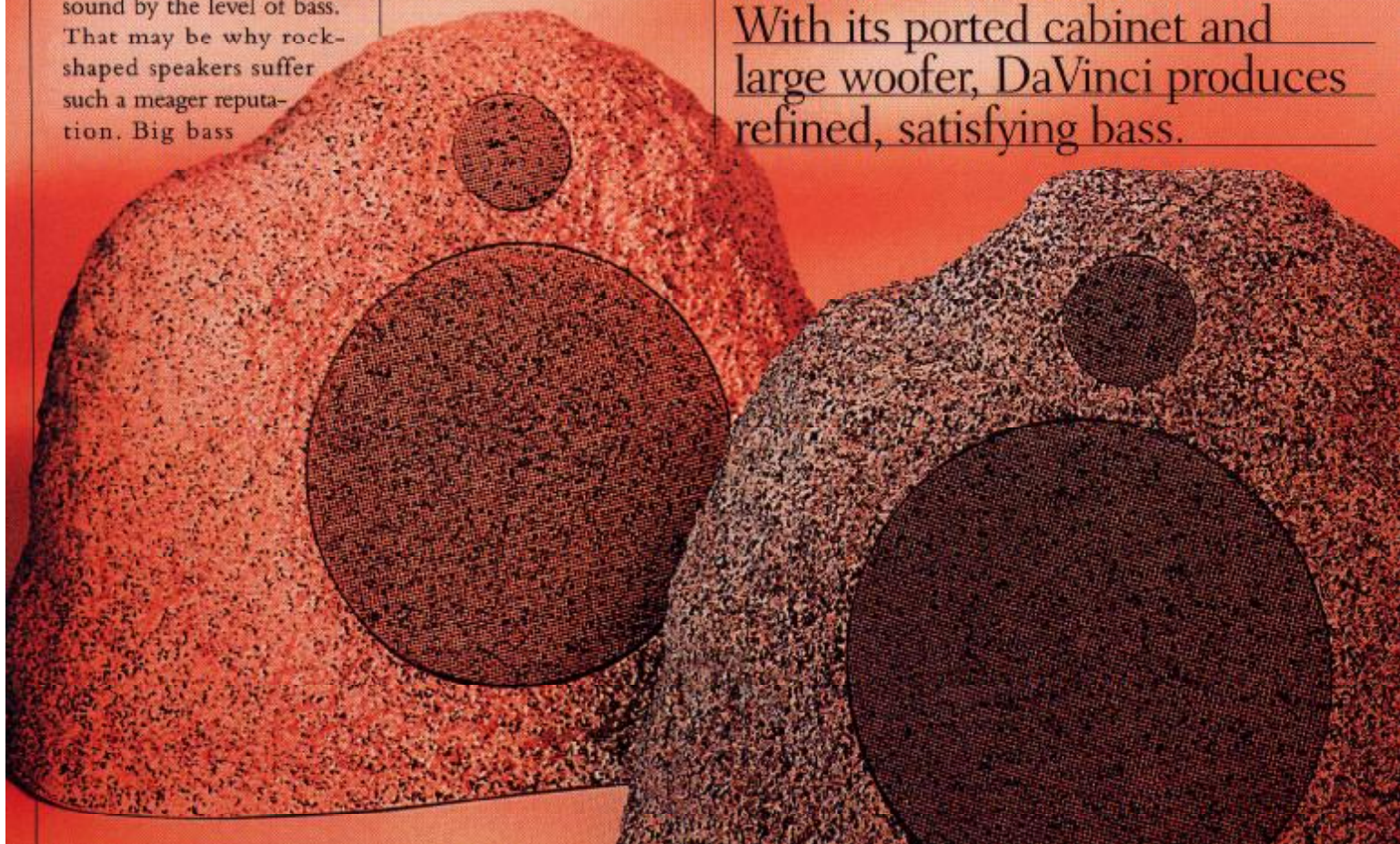
8-inch woofer and a ported cabinet, which provides a deeper bass response than the sealed cabinets of other rock speakers. Ported cabinets are fairly common in home systems, but this is, to my knowledge, their first appearance in a rock-shaped speaker.

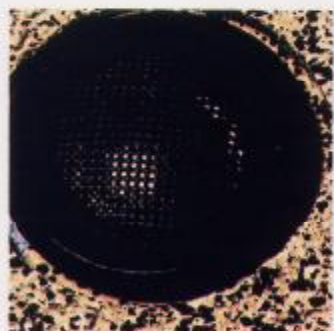
Why do other manufacturers avoid this design in their rock speakers? Because water and insects

could find their way into the port and thus inside the speaker enclosure. (Even the most devout Buddhist might take a dim view of beetles warming themselves on his speaker magnets.) StereoStone's engineers claim that by employing an L-shaped port tube with a 304 stainless-steel grille and two nylon filters, they can effectively eliminate any possibility of invasion by moisture or mite.

DaVinci's designers did not stop there. They have also mounted the speaker drivers from the front instead of from the rear, as in most rock-shaped speakers. Thus, the drivers breathe freely without being sur-

**ROCK CONCERT:**  
 With its ported cabinet and large woofer, DaVinci produces refined, satisfying bass.





*DaVinci's swiveling, titanium-dome tweeter (left) puts the tweeters in most rock-shaped speakers to shame. On previous page, DaVinci in gray granite and brown granite finishes.*

rounded by cabinet edges that can reflect sound and impair performance. The cabinet itself is made from an extremely dense, nonresonant material.

Most rock-shaped speakers protect their drivers with a slotted faux-stone grille that can interfere with the sound. DaVinci, instead, shields its drivers with conventional, perforated grilles of stainless steel that have little effect on performance. Although the steel grilles sport a flecked, faux-rock finish, they are somewhat more visible than most rock-speaker grilles. But despite their prominent appearance, I find DaVinci's grilles more attractive than slotted rock-speaker grilles, but I suppose that is simply a matter of taste.

The designers chose a titanium-dome tweeter (the speaker part that reproduces the upper range). According to StereoStone, this tweeter offers both outstanding performance and weather resistance. The driver also swivels, allowing the installer to point it directly at you for optimum sound.

I note DaVinci's greatest strength almost as soon as I hit the play button on my CD changer. Even when

the rock speakers are playing outdoors, I can tell from my living room that DaVinci would handily outshame most other rock speakers. Every bass note it produces sounds precise and natural. And each note stops when it is supposed to, rather than lingering to harmonize with the next.

Much of this bass performance surely results from the ported cabinet design, but StereoStone President Ken Rottner also attributes it to the speaker's design simplicity. DaVinci does not use electrical crossover components—such as coils or capacitors—to filter the treble (high) frequencies from the woofer. (It does have a capacitor that filters bass out of the tweeter.) Rottner says omitting the electrical crossover components helps the amplifier maintain control of the woofer, and thus improves the precision of DaVinci's bass response.

There is a trade-off to this approach, though. With no electrical crossover components to filter high frequencies from DaVinci's woofer, the woofer must reproduce almost the

entire range of the human voice, and voices do not sound as natural coming from an 8-inch woofer as they do when emanating from smaller speaker drivers. But remembering my earlier sentiments about what most consumers value in a speaker, I feel that 90 percent of DaVinci's potential buyers would consider StereoStone's design decisions a wise trade-off.

DaVinci positively blooms when one of my Wes Montgomery CDs comes up in the changer. The speaker's excellent tweeter throws a startling soundstage across my backyard, as if an entire jazz group is floating above the flowerbed. I find this effect addictive. And I hear the same effect as I spin Hawaiian slack-key guitar CDs, orchestral discs and bluegrass instrumentals. This speaker performs best at exactly the task to which I most commonly put an outdoor speaker: belting out hours of jazz CDs as I relax in my backyard.

From the comfort of my outdoor recliner, with cigar in hand and a healthy supply of bourbon, I enjoy

many an afternoon with DaVinci. It is the closest I have come to achieving indoor sound quality outdoors. And I am not alone. Rottner says that a major recording industry figure recently discarded all 50 rock speakers on his estate and replaced them with DaVincis. I thought that was a conspicuous frivolity at first, but now I can sympathize. *For a list of in-depth technical measurements and data, please visit our website at [www.hedmag.com](http://www.hedmag.com).* **HE&D**

#### ■ DESCRIPTION

Rock-shaped speaker for outdoor or indoor use.

#### ■ DIMENSIONS

15 x 19.1 x 11.5 inches (HWD).

#### ■ CONNECTIONS

Five-way speaker-cable binding posts with weatherproof cover.

#### ■ COMPONENTS

Eight-inch polypropylene-cone woofer, one-inch titanium-dome tweeter.

#### ■ PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: \$1,400 per pair  
CONTACT: (800) 350-7866  
[www.stereostone.com](http://www.stereostone.com)

