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Wharfedale Diamond 12.3 review

What Hi-Fi? Awards 2021 winner. Refined, entertaining and affordable floorstanders *Tested at £499 / \$798 / AU\$1699*

★★★★★ By [What Hi-Fi?](#) published

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(Image: © Wharfedale)

What Hi-Fi? Verdict ★★★★★

Wharfedale's Diamond 12.3 floorstanders are refined, entertaining and well built. What's not to like?

Pros

- + Superbly balanced presentation
- + Expressive and revealing midrange
- + Pleasing build and finish

Cons

- Nothing at this price

Mention the words 'Wharfedale Diamond', and the image that comes to mind is that of a small talented budget standmounters. That description applies to the originals from 1982, as well as the star performers from subsequent generations.

What of the various Diamond floorstanders? As a breed, they have proven to be solid over the years but relatively unremarkable on the whole. Wharfedale, like pretty much every other speaker brand out there, has struggled to make a properly musical budget tower. Until now that is.

While the new 12.3 can't truly be called budget, they do sit at the more affordable end of the market. Most importantly, they have a musical performance that, if anything, impresses us even more than that delivered by the lauded [Diamond 12.1](#) standmounters.

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(Image credit: Wharfedale)

Wharfedale tends to start with a clean sheet every few generations of the Diamond, and so it is with the 12 series. The cabinet is a carefully crafted, straight-edged design that's strategically braced to provide a solid and low resonance platform for the drive units to work from. It's all wrapped in a neat, classy finish that belies the 12.3's modest price. We even like the tidy feet arrangement and smart design of the spikes.

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WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 12.3 TECH SPECS



(Image credit: Wharfedale)

Type 2.5-way floorstander

Sensitivity 89dB

Nominal impedance 8ohms

Frequency response 45Hz - 20kHz

Dimensions (hwd) 98 x 18 x 32cm

Weight 19.5kg (each)

These speakers are available in four finishes: black, walnut, white and a rather classy light oak. And the drive units are just as admirable. The 12.3 are a 2.5-way design where the upper 13cm driver covers everything from midrange downwards, leaving the second one to reinforce the lows. Both drivers use a cone material called Klarity, a mix of polypropylene and mica, claimed to be light, rigid and well damped.

Wharfedale follows standard industry practice by using the same tweeter throughout the Diamond 12 range. It's a 25mm coated woven polyester soft dome, and a good one it is too. A carefully shaped faceplate leaves as much of the dome exposed as possible, and the contouring closest to the dome is there to provide a small degree of horn loading.

Combined with a carefully calibrated, relatively sophisticated crossover, the result is a speaker with a sensitivity of 89dB/W/m and a nominal impedance that's quoted as being 8ohm compatible.

Perhaps it's more useful to know that the minimum impedance is 5ohms, which means these floorstanders are unlikely to give any decent price-compatible amplifier a problem.

At just short of 98cm tall, the 12.3 aren't massive speakers, but they still perform best if given a little room to breathe. We find they work well if positioned at least 50cm from the rear wall; we settle on 90cm in our test room. Similarly, keep them at least 70cm away from the

can have the transparency to make the most of the best price compatible separate components around.

Compatibility



(Image credit: Wharfedale)

The Diamond 12.3 are masters at juggling these almost contradictory demands. They're smooth, even-handed and wonderfully refined for the money. Feed them a poor signal and they are skilled at revealing the shortcomings without shouting about them. They'll round off rough edges and downplay unwanted aggression without sounding like they're smothering the life out of the music.

But given a good source and suitably capable amplification, they perform superbly. While we use our usual reference [Naim ND555/555 PS DR](#) music streamer and [Burmester 088/911 Mk3](#) amplifier for part of the test, the bulk of our listening is done with more price compatible electronics in the form of the [Marantz PM6007](#) amplifier and [Cambridge CXN](#) streamer. Regardless of the combination, these Wharfedales work a treat.

Sound



Feed them *Trance Frenz* by Ólafur Arnalds and they deliver a lovely layered sound that's brimming with detail and dynamic nuance. These speakers capture the album's laid-back rhythms in a pleasingly sure-footed manner and don't get tripped up when things get complex.

They resolve a large amount of information but also present it in an organised and controlled way. The Wharfedale's chief rival is the multiple Award-winning [Fyne Audio F302](#), which sound more enthusiastic but are notably less refined at high frequencies and lack the Diamond's innate sophistication.

As we move from Jay Z's *Blueprint 3* to Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love*, we appreciate the 12.3's articulate and expressive midrange and the seamless integration between the drive units. We like how Wharfedale has avoided excess; there's enough bass weight to satisfy but not so much that it spoils the balance of the presentation. The lows are agile, satisfyingly rich and textured with it.

These Diamonds also sound good at lower volume levels. Too often we come across speakers that only come alive when pushed hard, but the 12.3 can be enjoyed at levels that won't wake the kids or upset the neighbours late at night. That counts for a lot in our books.

Play them louder and these speakers don't complain. They deliver Hans Zimmer's raucous *The Battle* from the *Gladiator* OST with verve, tracking the brutal dynamics well. There's punch and power when required, but also a level of subtlety that's rare to find in a floorstander at this price. You can add an even tonal balance and stable stereo imaging to the list of plus points, too.

Verdict

It's tough to make a truly talented affordable floorstander, but Wharfedale has cracked it with the 12.3. They are terrifically accomplished for the money and good enough to claim a space in the Diamond's hall of fame. Don't buy another tower at this level without hearing this one first.

SCORES

- Sound 5
- Compatibility 5
- Build 5

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