



Monitor Audio W380-LCR In-wall and C380-FX In-ceiling Speakers with RSW12 Subwoofer

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Has Monitor Audio Done it Again?

Consumers are sitting in the sweet spot when it comes to choosing in-wall loudspeakers. The selection of in-walls is so broad, there is sure to be a speaker for everyone's listening tastes and room decor.

British speaker manufacturer Monitor Audio's products are highly regarded by audiophiles and music lovers. I've reviewed a few of their in-room speakers and reported excellent sound quality, so has Monitor done it again with in-wall speakers?

One of their newest in-walls is the flagship W380-LCR, which, if you didn't guess, is intended for left, center and right channels, and can also be used for surround speakers. Since many homeowners prefer in-ceiling surround speakers, I installed a pair of the Monitor Audio C380-FX speakers, the in-ceiling complement to the W380-LCR for this review. I also tested the Monitor Audio RSW12 powered subwoofer in the system.

Features

The W380-LCR is a three-way rectangular speaker with an eight-inch woofer and a dual-concentric midrange/tweeter module that can be pivoted up to 18-degrees to direct the sound toward the listening area. The C380-FX is an eight-inch two-way round speaker with dual tweeters that can be configured for bipole or dipole (direct or diffuse) sound radiation patterns depending on speaker placement or listening preference, such as movies or multichannel music.

Both the W380-LCR and C380-FX borrow Monitor's C-CAM® (Ceramic-Coated Aluminum/Magnesium) and RST® (Rigid Surface Technology) driver technologies found in their Gold Series in-room speakers. The woofers use the company's C-CAM cone material combined with Monitor's RST. The RST speaker cone resembles the surface of a golf ball with hundreds of dimples on its surface designed to reduce cone break up, enable smooth frequency response and increase power handling capacity.

The RSW12 powered subwoofer is from Monitor Audio's Silver range of speakers. Its forward-firing design incorporates a twelve-inch C-CAM woofer with a four-inch voice coil, powered by a 500-watt D-class digital amplifier in an acoustic suspension enclosure. The RSW12 has one of the most solid, inert enclosures I've seen in a subwoofer. A rap

on the side of its gloss black cabinet reveals no resonance and it weighs in at 56 pounds, which begs for two people to unpack and move it.

Installing the 300 Series

Since I'm reluctant to cut holes in my living room walls to test in-wall speakers, I built several testing bays or portable walls. They're moveable walls constructed like a typical residential wall with 2 x 4 studs spaced 16-inches on-center, covered with ½" drywall and filled with R-13 insulation. The bays are big enough to simulate the cavity volume of a real wall, but portable enough to move around the room.

The C380-FX in-ceiling speakers have a depth of 6 ¼", so I built separate enclosures to accommodate their greater depth. The extended depth of the C380-FX may present a problem in cathedral ceilings, which may not have adequate space behind the speaker.



Both models feature Monitor Audio's Tri-Grip® dog-leg clamps (known as 'fixings' in the UK) to secure the speaker to the wall or ceiling.

Listening Tests

The W380-LCR and the C380-FX speakers have a signature timbre I've heard in other Monitor Audio loudspeakers.

They have a snappy, crisp

sound quality with quick transient response, particularly with percussion instruments, as in the piano in Diana Krall's "Devil May Care" from her *Live In Paris* album (Verve Records). Bela Fleck's unmistakable banjo in "Slipstream" from his *Drive* album (SACD, Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs) sounded taut and accurate without being brittle. The Monitor Audio 300 Series speakers are very musical and easy to listen to for extended periods of time.

The Monitor Audio system sounded very natural in *Undertow* (DVD, MGM Home Entertainment), a depressing, macabre story set in a backwater region of Georgia. The music in the action sequences immersed the viewer in the suspense and the speakers created a very convincing soundfield with excellent dialog clarity.

I preferred the +3dB setting for the tweeters in the W380-LCRs, which added a bit of sparkle to the upper ranges. I tested the speakers with the Boundary Compensation

switch set to 'OFF' since the speakers were not installed near a corner wall or other adjacent surface.



As mentioned previously, the C380-FX can be used as a bipole or dipole surround speaker and can be set manually with the switch on the baffle, or configured automatically via a +12V trigger connection from a receiver or processor. If you listen to a variety of multichannel sources, this feature will be very useful.

Bass response is more than adequate without a subwoofer, although for extended bass a sub is required and the RSW12 integrated nicely with the system. The RSW12 delivered solid bass response especially when the EQ2 position was selected, providing a +4dB boost at 21Hz for extra LFE impact.

Summary

The Monitor Audio 300 Series in-wall/in-ceiling speakers offer great performance and real value. They have a musical sound quality that will likely please the ears of casual and critical listeners alike and make a fine choice for a mid-line music or home theater system. Their quick transient response, clean midrange and detailed high-end sound qualities are similar to many of their in-room speakers.

For the most impact with movie sources a sub is recommended, but bass and mid-bass response is more than adequate even without a subwoofer. The 300 Series speakers include multiple sound adjustments, so they can be placed in multiple locations and fine-tuned for each installation. If you like Monitor Audio's in-room speakers, you'll also appreciate their in-wall models—Monitor Audio has done it again.

DESCRIPTION

System consists of three Monitor Audio W380-LCR in-wall speakers for stereo or home theater use, with two C380-FX in-ceiling surround speakers and RSW12 subwoofer. Subwoofer is recommended for home theater use, optional for stereo use.

COMPONENTS

W380-LCR In-wall: Three-way, 8-inch speaker with C-CAM woofer and dual concentric midrange/tweeter module

C380-FX In-ceiling: Two-way, 8-inch speaker with C-CAM woofer and dual tweeters; configurable for dipole or bipole surround speaker use.

RSW12 subwoofer: 12-inch C-CAM woofer powered by 500-watt Class D amplifier in an acoustic suspension enclosure.

CONNECTIONS

W380-LCR: Gold-plated, push type speaker terminals

C380-FX: Gold-plated, push type speaker terminals with terminals to connect to a +12V trigger for bipole or dipole operation.

RSW12: RCA line-in, line-out connections

DIMENSIONS (HWD)

W380-LCR: 16 5/8" H x 10 5/8" W x 3 7/8" (mounting depth)

C380-FX: 11 1/4" round x 6 3/16"

RSW12 Sub: 13 3/8" H x 13 3/8" W x 14 1/2" D

