

Monitor Audio Silver RX Series Speaker System

A do-it-all system that has the looks and the power.



By Brent Butterworth
May 2010

In Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley, where I live, "naked" is all the rage. That's not just because the Valley is the world capital of adult video production. It's also because the SFV is home to several of America's leading speaker reviewers. Don't worry — as far as I know, the reviewers are keeping their clothes on. But many of the speakers they review are not.

Today's trend in speaker design is to let it all hang out — to cast off the grilles and put the woofers, midranges, and tweeters on bold display. We're even seeing this trend in in-wall speakers and soundbars.

The latest "naked" speakers to enter my home are Monitor Audio's Silver RX series, which were clearly designed to be used without grilles. Many past Monitor Audio designs sported dolled-up drivers that look good exposed, but most of the speakers' faces were marred with unsightly rubber grommets needed to hold the grilles in place. In the new Silver RX series speakers, Monitor Audio has replaced those grommets with magnets hidden under the wood veneer. Just touch the grille to the front and the concealed magnets almost magically grab hold. But like the robes that the Valley's more risqué on-screen performers wear between takes, the grilles are there only as a courtesy — the idea is that you'll use the speakers with no adornment at all.

Key Features

\$3,975 monitoraudiousa.com

- Silver RX6 tower speaker (\$1,250/pair)
6-inch woofer; 6-inch midrange/woofer; 1-inch tweeter; 35[5/8] in high; 36[1/8] lb
- Silver RX Centre speaker (\$675 each)
(1) 6-inch woofer, (1) 6-inch midrange/woofer; 1-inch tweeter; 19[11/16] in wide; 21[1/8] lb
- Silver RXFX surround speaker (\$750/pair)
6-inch midrange/woofer; (2) 1-inch tweeters; 11[13/16] in wide; 10[3/8] lb
- Silver RXW-12 (\$1,300 each)
12-inch woofer; 500-watt amplifier; 15 in high; 49[5/8] lb

There's a side benefit to the naked design concept: Speakers usually sound better with their grilles off. That's why some manufacturers of exotic high-end speakers don't even offer grilles as an option.

Beyond the cosmetics, the Silver RX series follows the usual Monitor Audio script. To cut distortion, the company's proprietary Ceramic-Coated Aluminum/Magnesium (C-CAM) material stiffens the diaphragms in its woofers, midranges, and tweeters. The speaker cabinets are compact, which you might expect given that they were designed in Britain by people who live in 500-square-foot row houses built in the 18th century.

The system that Monitor Audio's North American distributor supplied me for review consists of two RX6 tower speakers, an RX Centre, two RXFX surround speakers, and an RXW-12 subwoofer. All except the subwoofer employ the same 1-inch tweeter and 6-inch midrange/woofer in various combinations. The RX6 adds a 6-inch woofer that lacks the polished phase plug at the center of the midwoofer's cone. A switch lets you run the RXFX's dual tweeters in bipolar (in-phase) mode for a more directional sound or in dipolar (reverse-phase) mode for a more diffused sound. The sub has a 12-inch C-CAM woofer and an internal amp rated at 500 watts continuous.

All models are available in four wood finishes, or in black or white lacquer for an additional cost. Sadly, the subwoofer and the surround speaker don't conform to the "naked" theme — their front baffles bear the usual rubber grille grommets.

SETUP

The Silver FX series' conservative design could be considered either well grounded in tradition or same-old, same-old. But there's no denying that the straightforward design makes setup easy. Except for the necessity of attaching a plinth to the bottom of each RX6, you basically pull the speakers out of the boxes and plop them in place. Large thumbwheels make it convenient to adjust the leveling spikes on the bottom of the RX6 and the RXW-12.

Each RX6 is supplied with what the manual awkwardly refers to as a "port bung," a foam cylinder that stuffs into the front bass port to reduce low-frequency response. The manual recommends using it in small rooms. In my large home theater, it wasn't necessary.

The RXFX has a rear-mounted bipole/dipole switch, which is difficult to access when the speaker is hung on the wall, although most people set this switch once and never touch it again. After a bit of experimentation, I set it to bipole, but that's just a personal preference.

The RXW-12 has a convenient top-mounted volume control, as well as pushbuttons that let you select two equalization curves. EQ 1 selects a flat frequency response, while EQ 2 adds a 4-dB boost at 21 Hz — a feature intended to give action movies a little more kick.



PERFORMANCE

I started my listening sessions with the grilles off, as I do with most of the speakers I review. But while I enjoyed the speakers' crisp, present treble, it sounded just a bit too bright for me. Placing the grilles on the speakers tamed the treble perfectly. But suddenly I was in a weird situation. Normally people might remove their speaker grilles for listening, then replace them to protect the speakers from accidental damage. I was doing just the opposite — leaving the gorgeous speakers to stand naked but covering them with the grilles for listening.

Speaker grilles tend to dull the upper treble, but not in this case. High-frequency percussion instruments came through particularly clearly. When I played the jazz/funk classic “What I Say” from Miles Davis’s *Live-Evil* CD, the pandeiro (tambourine) and agogô bells played by Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira seemed to float right between and about a foot above the speakers. The percussion stood out from the group’s sonic fracas as if I were hearing the music performed live in a small club.

At the other end of the sonic spectrum, the RX6 staggered me with its deep, dynamic bass. The towers perfectly replicated the fast, fat groove of Michael Henderson’s electric bass on “What It Is” and even took a stab at the couch-shaking, ultra-deep pipe organ notes on Michael Murray’s recording of Joseph Jongen’s “Symphony Concertante” with

the San Francisco Symphony. For a small speaker with two 6-inch woofers, the RX6's performance is astounding. With so much great stuff going on in the highs and lows, I almost forgot to evaluate the speaker's mids. But that's partly because they sounded so natural that they didn't call attention to themselves.

The RX6's dynamics left me pining for a dumb, loud action movie. Luckily, I had on hand the Blu-ray Disc of *Fast and Furious*, a classic "ram all the faders to the top" soundtrack mix. The RX series system perfectly reproduced the four different sounds in *Fast and Furious* (roaring engines, squealing tires, throbbing music, and pummeling of lowlifes by Vin Diesel). Had I been blindfolded for this test, I'd have thought I was listening to a high-end system designed for a 25-seat home theater. The RX6 and Monitor's surprisingly potent little RXW-12 subwoofer's dynamics let them accurately deliver this over-the-top movie's soundtrack with a complete lack of audible distortion even when I played them really, really loud.

The RXFX surround speakers' timbre matching was superb — as objects flew past me during the movie's driving scenes, the sound effects were remarkably consistent as they shifted from the front speakers to the surrounds. This characteristic helped the system produce an enveloping effect that drew me into whatever I was watching.

The RX Centre seemed subtly brighter-sounding than the RX6, even with its grille on, but I noticed that only when I was listening critically; once I got into the movie or TV show I was watching, I immediately forgot about the difference.



BOTTOM LINE

I'm surprised at the raw power of Monitor Audio's Silver RX speakers. I'm delighted at their vivid sonic imaging. And I'm charmed by their gorgeous looks — with or without

the grilles attached. If you're seeking a compact, do-it-all system, I doubt you can do much better than this one.

Ratings

Design: 7

Performance: 8

Value: 7

Overall Score: 7.3

Certified + Recommended YES