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MUSIC FROM THE BIRCHWOOD

Open-plan living and clean minimalist lines can be hard to achieve. **Simon Conde** took an innovative approach to banishing AV clutter in this modern barn conversion

“When I came across the barn it already had planning permission to knock it down and build from scratch,” explains the owner of the conversion featured here. “But when I saw the wonderful Northampton Stone and beautiful original exposed beams I decided to rescue it and make it a truly remarkable home.”

London architect Simon Conde was tasked not only with producing the plans to renovate this fine old building but to marry the latest home entertainment technology to the interior without compromising the design visually. Fortunately, the architect shared the client’s vision and understood that safeguarding the integrity of the barn was important to the whole project.

A key part of the new interior is the birchwood panelling, which extends from floor to roof height in

the main living area. Each sheet of birchwood panel was laid out, assessed for overall effect then cut for positioning. The craftsmen studied the grain carefully during installation, meticulously matching each piece, with the result that even the doors of the built-in storage form part of a seamless whole.

Although the client was keen to have the benefit of a home entertainment system, he was wary of breaking up the clean line of the interior by putting too much equip-

ment on show, particularly conventional ‘wooden box’ speaker enclosures. Keeping the rest of the equipment out of sight was easy enough, as it was all tucked away in one of the integral cupboards.

“The architect suggested that we look at Amina Plaster In-wall speakers as a solution for the audio,” the client recalls. “They seemed to fit the bill as they could be installed in the wall or ceiling and when plastered over they would be invisible.” He was “surprised and delighted”

when Amina’s technical team suggested that the speakers be installed behind wooden panelling.

In contrast to a cone loudspeaker – which is essentially a piston alternately compressing and rarefying air to create sound – the core of an Amina speaker is a lightweight composite panel. This, in turn, uses the surface to which it is connected to excite the air with its tiny vibrations. It is similar in principle to the soundboard of an acoustic instrument, such as a guitar or violin.

Although the vast majority of Amina installations see the units plastered over once they are in situ, the installation of the loudspeakers into the wood panels at the barn turned out to be straightforward. Once the position for the speakers was decided, the appropriate panels were removed and the template of the speaker scribed out on the back. The wood was then routed out of the back of the panels, leaving 2mm of material.

This is the same thickness as is recommended for plaster and, although it is not critical to the point that it is beyond the skills of a professional plaster, a thicker covering would reduce the achievable



System:

- Teac AV – Home Theatre AG H550
- Teac DVD player DV H550
- Sky HD Digibox
- Hitachi widescreen TV
- Four Amina AIW5 speakers
- Subwoofer

EQUIPMENT



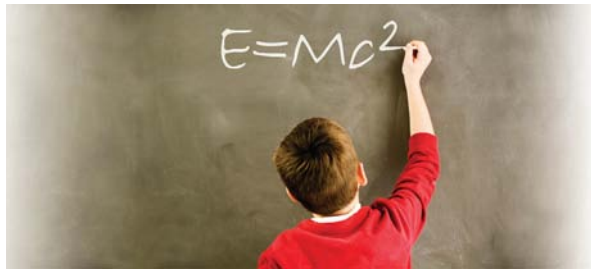
For this installation, the Amina units were literally stuck into place with specialist wood adhesive, with pressure applied to ensure a good bond. Once the adhesive had set,

the speakers were wired up to the amplifier and the system was ready. "The speakers are used across a wide mix from opera and classical to home cinema and they sound

quite extraordinary," the client offers. "The detail in the sound is unlike anything I've heard from

conventional speakers and the way they fill the whole space is truly phenomenal." **RSE**

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sound level. However, the Amina team was confident of the end result – not just because of theoretical data but as a result of practical tests in the past, which have shown the units can still function, even when attached to as rigid a surface as glass. (However, it's fair to say you won't that placement as a suggestion in the application notes for installers.)

The positioning of the speakers is less critical that would be the case with conventional units because of the way the Amina units propagate sound. According to the manufacturer, when they units vibrate, they produce a diffuse sound wave that is essentially hemispherical.

Because of this largely omnidirectional quality, the sound is relatively consistent throughout the room, rather than producing a 'sweet spot' that can be experienced in only one listening position. If that all seems a bit too hypothetical, a good model is the way sound is produced by a grand piano. The instrument can be heard and enjoyed throughout a concert hall but the players doesn't walk away from the piano deafened at the end of a performance.