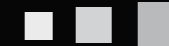


Magico Q7 Loudspeakers



Black MAGIC

Can a pair of loudspeakers be good enough to warrant a R2-million price tag? The Magico Q7 is widely considered one of the world's leading loudspeaker designs. It's also one of the most expensive. But what does this no-holds-barred floorstander actually sound like?

- **T**he notion of a pair of loudspeakers costing in the region of R2-million a pair seems, at least from a layman's perspective, to border on the ludicrous.
- But then, one should consider such expenditure not only in the context of the performance potential such an elevated asking price infers, but also the cost of actually developing and producing an extremely complex, totally in-house design utilising exotic materials and cutting-edge R&D technology.
- Of course, I had seen images of the Magico Q7s long before I flew into Durban for my auditioning session with the only pair currently in South Africa. I knew they were big, black and heavy. But as it turns out, the Q7s don't photograph easily, and besides, the appearance of a loudspeaker only rarely indicates what it's likely to sound like!

Ensclosed in the main demonstration room at Audio Excellence, the Magico Q7s looked less imposing than I expected – not that a mainly black, five-driver tower design standing 1,52 metres tall could ever be called svelte or subtle.

It's not as overwhelmingly large or industrial as the Wilson Audio Alexandria XLF, nor as imposingly tall as the Dynaudio Evidence Master, but the Q7 has an inherent purposefulness and a solid, unyielding presence that is striking in itself – a kind of Dark Knight look that is both benign and mildly menacing.

Positioned in a free-standing configuration along the longer axis of the 7 x 5,5 metre room, and toed in towards the listening position (a couch placed about 60 cm from the rear wall) the Q7s certainly didn't appear particularly complex on a technical level. Indeed, it's easy to underestimate the technology that's been applied here.

So let me first describe what you can see: a dark but smart tower speaker, with five drivers vertically aligned, and mounted on what appears to be a softly rounded, almost organic aluminium baffle.

The rest of the enclosure, by comparison, is anything but organic. The precisely aligned panels are solid aluminium alloy, and are machined to extremely close tolerances. The top plate slopes rearwards, while part of the rear panel flares outwards, both in the interests of



combating standing waves, and to create some aesthetic interest.

The metals used for the enclosure include mostly aluminium, but also copper and stainless steel. The entire construction uses more than a 100 different components, and is held together by some 650 fasteners. More about the stiffness and rigidity of the cabinet later.

Viewed in profile, a visible copper divider plate suggests separate upper and lower sections – the top part apparently housing the lower midrange and the tweeter, with the lower accommodating the midrange, and the dual woofer array.

As it turns out, the midrange is housed in a completely isolated, floating internal enclosure not visible from the outside, and not attached to the baffle at all. The tweeter is the only driver fixed to the outer, curved baffle.

The remaining drivers are affixed to the less obvious, solid aluminium inner baffle, and are merely surrounded by the outer baffle in the interests of combating diffraction.

The Q7 rests on beautifully machined, stainless steel feet that are large and rounded, rather than spiked, as the 340 kg makes the use of spikes impractical. The rear panel employs dual sets of Furutech binding posts.

If you were able to see inside the Q7's enclosure, you'd see a labyrinthine arrangement of braces that connect the various panels in three axes, and thus creating an extremely rigid, very stiff structure. Together with proprietary and unspecified damping, the result is a highly inert structure that provides the perfect platform for the driver array.

Those drivers deserve closer scrutiny. Designed and developed in house, they are wholly proprietary, and are also assembled by Magico from components either manufactured by the company or made to Magico's

specification by specialist suppliers.

Let's start with the beryllium-alloy dome tweeter, which is a high-dispersion, extended bandwidth design that reaches all the way up to a claimed 50 kHz. It looks almost impossibly dainty in the company of the four cone drives surrounding it.

Of those, the dedicated midrange is the smallest, but all four share similar characteristics, including massive, oversized magnet arrays fashioned from N48 neodymium, which is much more powerful (and thus much more expensive) than the regular-strength neodymium magnets used many more conventional speaker designs.

Huge voice coils, underslung motor assemblies, and high-excursion spiders are also common to the mid, mid/bass and bass drivers, creating a driver set that have high SPL capability (and, by implication, high efficiency) in common.

One more thing about the cones – they feature a carbon fibre-based material that Magico calls Nano-Tec. It's basically a sandwich comprising a layer of specifically-patterned carbon fibre weave on either side, with a Rohacell foam core.

The entire diaphragm is then coated with a carbon-laced resin for added strength and homogeneity, creating a speaker cone that is very light, extremely stiff, and not prone to colouration or break-up.

The crossover is a four-way, 24 dB Linkwitz-Reilly design, bolted to the rear panel directly in line with the binding posts in the interests of short signal paths. Huge capacitors and inductors suggest a level of competence way beyond the loudspeaker norm.

A final word on the design, before we get onto the serious business of listening. As the above description suggests, the Q7s reflect a no-holds-barred, regardless-of-cost design approach, which goes some way to explaining their astronomical price tag.

The company's stated intent with the Q7 was to create a loudspeaker with the capability to render music to a level of realism approaching that of a live performance. Yes, I know: that's usually the stated intent of any new loudspeaker

design, but one usually compromised by the harsh realities of commercial intent.

The objective of Magico's CEO Alon Wolf was to create the ultimate reference speaker – a clean sheet design that could combine the best attributes of horns, electrostatic panels, ribbons and dynamic drivers without any of their shortcomings. In other words, a loudspeaker epitomising the best of all worlds.

The R&D process leading up to the production of the Q7 included the use of advanced computer graphic modelling, CAD-based acoustic simulators and emulators, and ultra-accurate real-time analysis, to determine the parameters for this reference design.

The loudspeakers were then created to match those parameters, with little regard for existing, off-the-shelf parts, and a commitment to developing the required elements (drive units, enclosure design, crossover board) from scratch.

That goes some way towards explaining the high acquisition costs associated with Magico Q7 ownership.

So, back to the pair of Q7s in the Audio

Excellence demo room. If you visit the company's website (www.audioexcellence.co.za) there is a series of images showing them being delivered and installed. Think trucks, crates and forklifts and you get the general idea ...

Audio Excellence is the appointed Magico dealer in South Africa, and the Q7s are on permanent demo: those seeking to buy a pair can order them to spec, and expect to wait about three months for delivery.

As can be seen from our summary, the system driving the Q7s certainly wasn't short of power. The big McIntosh monoblocks (the kind of Big Macs I really like), provide the seemingly limitless power that will make even the most difficult of speaker loads seem benign.

They were partnered by the brand's flagship single-chassis McIntosh C2500 pre-amp, while the source components were a duo of Linn products – a Linn Majik DS media streamer, providing access to a repository of uncompressed FLAC music files on a remote server, and a Linn Uniti 1.1 universal player.

VITAL STATS

Enclosure type	Sealed, floorstanding
Drive units	1x 25 mm tweeter, 1x 152 mm midrange, 1x 254 mm mid-bass, 2x 305 mm woofers
Bi-wiring	Yes
Impedance	4 ohms nominal
Sensitivity	94 dB
Frequency response	20 Hz to 50 kHz
Power handling	50 - 1 200 watts
Dimensions (HxDxW)	1 524 x 813 x 381 mm
Weight	340 kg each
PRICE	R2.1 million (Exchange rate dependant) per pair

VERDICT

Quite possibly one of the world's finest loudspeakers. Astonishing fidelity, scale and outright realism, but in the context of an intoxicatingly engaging and completely unflagging delivery.

SUPPLIED BY
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OUR RATING: 91 / 100





As it happened, there was a third Linn source component – a customer LP12, undergoing a final post-service and set-up listening check before being returned to its owner. The C2500's built-in phono stage was put to good use, and the result was an apt demonstration of what decent vinyl can sound like, even on an ultra-revealing set-up.

Let me admit to being mesmerised from the very first bars of music being played. The first words that come to mind are effortless, transparent, accessible and dimensional. There's an ease and eloquence to the delivery of these speakers that makes the music, and the performance come alive in a way that is both un-electronic and completely believable.

In other words, there's a truth and an essence to the performance

that approaches the reality of a live performance with greater authenticity than I've ever heard before. The only speaker I can think of that approaches the same levels of intrinsic believability and unencumbered access to the music are the Vivid Audio Giya G1s.

The flow of the music, the coherence of the delivery, the scale and presence of the performance – and yes, the extended tonal range – all suggest an experience beyond the accepted boundaries of hi-fi, even hi-fi of the esoteric variety.

Mercedes Sosa's rendition of Ariel Ramirez's *Misa Criolla* (Decca CD) is one of those must-have recordings – a disc that features a truly heartfelt performance, captured in all its atmospheric, full-range splendour.

From the very first, sonorous drum

beat and the rising crescendo of the soaring chorus, to the first strains of Sosa's emotion-laden vocals, this is gripping, spellbinding stuff – and the Magicos effortlessly created the scale, the dimension and the impact needed to make the music come alive.

The ability of the Q7s to recreate the timbre, the transients, the tremendous dynamics of the performance all conspired to magically transport the entire ensemble right there into the listening room, seemingly regardless of any physical boundaries.

The tonal range of these loudspeakers deserves special mention. It's not just that they reach down extremely low (the claimed 20 Hz seems entirely credible), nor that their trebles have a lucid liquidity that is as revealing as it is engaging.

No sir, it is the ease with which it achieves this extended tonality, regardless of output level, that is so beguiling, together with a smooth flow of sound that simply arrives, without any sense of electronic delivery or projection.

That the tonal progression is completely linear, with a full complement of finely textured hues, and no apparent peaks or dips, is a further, vital factor contributing to the uncanny ability of the Magicos to deliver their musical wares with such a powerful sense of authenticity and immediacy.

Also on my listening list was what many would consider a clichéd choice: Diana Krall's *The Girl In The Other Room* (Verve SACD). But I wanted to hear how accurately the Q7s would handle John Clayton's intricate double bass intro, how well they would resolve the subtle fill-in guitar riffs of Anthony Wilson, and how well they would recreate the overriding sense of intimacy.

Again, it was the presence, the sense of being in the prime seat, of less listening to than actually experiencing the performance, that I found so compelling. Yes, there was an almost overwhelming harvest of detail, but always precisely, cohesively contextualised. And so, I could close my eyes and find myself right there, in the studio, sharing the performance.



I could hear Jeff Hamilton's every brush stroke on the snare, follow Clayton's fingers on the fret board, pick up the percussive effects of Krall's piano so often gone unnoticed in less lucid systems. But even the finest, slightest, most subtle of details was delivered with just enough verve to contribute to the overall sense of realism and balance.

It's been a good decade since I last listened to one of modern music's benchmark recordings: Oscars Mottetkör's seminal performance of *Cantate Domino* on the Proprius label. It used to be a staple of audio shows way back then, and the Magicos brought it back to powerful, compelling life.

Central to this performance is the majestic church organ – and the Magicos had no trouble in recreating the sheer scale and presence of the instrument, while doing full justice to the massive dynamics, the spatial splendour and the ambience of the recording.

Regardless of the music I threw at the Magicos, the result was always the

same: authentic, involving, completely believable music. Have I mentioned that, despite their extended frequency range, the Q7s never sounded aggressive, and that while the listening levels were generally higher than I would normally be comfortable with, the six or so hours spent in the Magico duo's company was not in the slightest fatiguing?

Of course, I could continue, trying to

describe the sheer thrill of listening in the company of the Magicos: how they made Pink Floyd's *The Wall* come vividly, rivetingly alive. How they laid bare every sinew of sound, regardless of genre, artist or format. How they could rock with Bonnie Raitt, bop with Joe McQueen, whistle along with Livingston Taylor – and make it all sound so thoroughly, intriguingly convincing.

Is the Magico Q7 the world's best loudspeaker? That's a tough question to answer when you haven't heard, and compared, many of the other pretenders to that throne.

But put it this way: the Q7 is one of the very best loudspeakers I've ever heard. While some designs fulfil some performance parameters better than others, the Magico Q7 is consistently, and equally, brilliant across the board.

It's that overall proficiency, that perfect balance between technical capability and musical empathy, that makes the Magico Q7 a landmark loudspeaker, regardless of the asking price.

Deon Schoeman



Associated Equipment

Linn LP12/Lingo/Ittok/Benz Micro Ace SL record deck
Linn Majik DS media streamer
Linn Unidisk 1.1 universal player
McIntosh C2500 pre-amp
McIntosh MC1.2kW monoblocks
Supra Sword balanced and single-ended interconnects
Supra Sword speaker cables
Supra 3G 2.5 power cables
Supra CAT7 network cabling

Software

Ramirez – *Misa Criolla* – Mercedes Sosa (Decca CD)
Diana Krall – *The Girl In The Other Room* (Verve SACD)
Jeff Golub – *Out Of The Blue* (Atlantic CD)
Oscars Mottetkör – *Cantate Domino* (Proprius SACD)
Joe McQueen & Friends – *Ten at 86* (Isomike SACD)
Bonnie Raitt – *Slipstream* (Redwing Records CD)
Livingston Taylor – *Ink* (Chesky CD)
Jim Cullum Jazz Band – *Playing With Fire* (Reference Recordings)
Pink Floyd – *The Wall* (EMI)
Kronos Quartet – *Pieces Of Africa* (Nonesuch)
Minnesota Orchestra – *Exotic Dances from the Opera* (Reference Recordings)
Rob Wasserman – *Duets* (MCA Jazz)
Brandon Marsalis – *Trio Jeepy* (Columbia)