



audio

Accessories, Part I - CORE Designs LP storage and BPT Cable Stilts

by Marshall Nack

Here's a pair of audio accessories I came across recently that I thought deserving of your notice. These products do what they're designed to do, plus have sonic benefits to boot.



CORE Designs LP storage

The old DoorStore ready-made behind the left speaker was in bad shape. Whenever I removed a record from this inexpensive bookcase the whole rickety thing wobbled from side to side. The back was bowed and detached in places. I worried that it might decide to come crashing down one day and wreck havoc on the gear in the vicinity. It had to go.

My first shopping stop was an unfinished furniture place. In short order the salesman roughed out a design for a bookcase with appropriate dimensions for LP storage. When he told me the price—well, I was stunned! The CORE Design five-shelf unit with a list of \$900 suddenly looked competitive—more than competitive when you consider its purpose-built design and higher quality workmanship, including those nicely turned, hand-worked finger joints. But then I had another reason to be interested in the CORE product... it's made from solid walnut.

The Wood Effect

I expect you all know the sonic properties of maple, as this wood has gained wide acceptance in the audiophile community. Select varieties of maple used for shelving and component supports impart a soft, warm, sweet acoustic

patina to everything. Even a little maple brings out complex nuances and details. You may even hear an increase in dynamics. It does wonders up top, purging glare and stridency. The bottom end gets tighter, while maintaining extension on top.

Some people call the patina a coloration; I find it alluring. Be that as it may, I also find it comes at a price—maple is an astringent and causes some loss of body. Using a lot can severely reduce low-end response. (Be aware that I'm talking about the maple variety used in musical instrument manufacture. A good source is [Mapleshade](#). Don't make the mistake of going to the local lumberyard and getting stock maple: it's the wrong variety and chances are it will just sound dull.)

Much less examined are the properties of other woods, such as walnut. Nobody, to my knowledge, has explored that one—except CORE Designs.



I heard what happened when I installed their walnut CLD amp stands. I was so impressed, it got me experimenting with samples of hickory, maple and walnut wood flooring. Those little blocks of solid walnut had a potent effect everywhere I tried them.

So I was mighty curious to see what introducing a big mass of it, like a bookcase, would have on the sound. While CORE makes LP shelving in a choice of woods (beech is available in addition to walnut), there was no question about which one I wanted.

It surpassed my expectations. Wait a minute: you're saying that a piece of furniture behind the speakers changed the sound? Yup.

Alongside maple, this has to be the sweetest, most natural top-end I've managed to date. No, it's more than just the top—it's all over. Both of these woods impart a similar patina.

And it's more than patina and individual frequencies. The mere presence of the wood in the room changes the soundstage. It opens up and fills the front of my room, and it sounds less artificial. The speakers have never disappeared to this degree.

Now, with another walnut storage unit behind the other speaker (I make every attempt to keep the room as symmetrical as possible), I feel I can navigate freely around the stage in three dimensions. It has what we often describe as enhanced transparency. I tell you, I'm quite seduced. This is as big as installing any room-tuning tweak I've encountered.

The biggest difference between the woods is that maple mainly does its thing in the treble, while the effects of walnut congregate in the midrange. You will unmistakably have enhanced midrange, as well as big-time increases in body—a combination people often describe as enhanced "tone".

So, yes, you can tune your room with furniture. And why not? Think of the perfectly natural tuning property of selected woods as akin to other kinds of room treatment. By extension, don't overlook carpets, couches and bookcases as tuning devices. Isn't that what you're doing with diffusers and absorbers—putting in ugly furniture?

Thought Your room is your most important component and everything you put into it is a sound-adjusting tweak. The room is king. If it is left untreated, even the best gear will only sound so-so.

I almost forgot: as far as storage, you can't do better than the purposeful design of the CORE LP bays. They have the exact shape and strength needed to store and organize your precious 12" recordings, and the built-in dividers are a thoughtful touch. Each shelf comes with two, which prevent the entire row from leaning to one side if the shelf is not full.

Installing the LP storage rack was trouble free. It arrived in good shape, double boxed and so over-packed that my neighbor saw the five boxes and thought I was undergoing kitchen renovation!

I should mention these LP bays are heavy. Shipping costs up the ante significantly. (I live on the east coast. CORE ships from the west.)

One note on the wood finish. Initially, I was struck by the workmanship, and was impressed by the quality for the asking price, especially those finger-joints. However, as I looked closer, I noticed small imperfections in the finish on practically every piece. Too bad: these minor blemishes preclude me from giving them a furniture-grade assessment. You will not be getting Thomasville or Henredon quality... but I suppose it would be ludicrous to expect that at the price. [CORE Designs](#)



Balanced Power Technology Cable Stilts

Below is the thank you note I sent to Chris Hoff of Balanced Power Technology after receiving his Cable Stilts:

Hi Chris,

Got your Cable Stilts on Friday. I've been looking for a good sounding cable support for a long time—now I've found one.

The design is as simple it as can be: a lightweight aluminum saw horse, with a scoop cut out in the middle of the top edge. You stretch a rubber band across the scoop; place the cable on it, so the rubber band distends in proportion to the cables' weight. Got a heavy cable? Use two rubber bands.

I expected rubber bands would make a good suspension, and it does. There's less shrillness on top—the treble has definitely smoothed out. Actually, there's less edginess across the frequency spectrum and more body.



The only thing they don't do is adjust for elevation—they come in one height only, about 3½" off the ground. I wonder if this is sufficient. What height do you need to get away from carpet-borne static electricity? The Polycrystal is 3½" high; the Mapleshade is adjustable up to 12". I'd like to see a taller Cable Stilt offered as well, one with a 6" height. The BPT replaced Polycrystal ceramic bells, Mapleshade wooden tripods, and some home-brew cardboard shipping tubes cut to size.

Best of all is their price: they're available now at the Internet sale price of 10 for \$99, shipping included.

[Balanced Power Technologies](#)

