

HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM OVER \$4000

➤ B&W 684 Theatre System

We were spoilt for choice when it came to theatre packages this year. We saw and heard a multiplicity of outstanding examples of the breed, with configurations varied in enclosure and driver materials, design philosophy, and aesthetics.

As one of the world's largest loudspeaker manufacturers, Bowers & Wilkins, affectionately known as B&W, has what can only be considered as a thoroughly expansive speaker range. The recent introduction of the comprehensive new 600 Series products presented the company with the opportunity to offer home theatre packages at various price points, using carefully-selected complementary models within the series. Jeppers, smaller manufacturers would be content to base their whole product range just on the 600 Series.

The 684 system benefits from extensive trickle-down technology and improved manufacturing techniques developed for B&W's highly respected 800 Series high-end speakers. The whole package and componentry is beautifully assembled and finished: quality speakers bearing the trademarks of large-scale manufacturing efficiencies.

The package consists of a pair of the 684 2.5-way floorstanders, the HTM62 centre channel, 686 surrounds and the ASW10 powered sealed subwoofer. There's a good choice of enclosure finishes, too, with a darkly-textured Wengé finish, tasty Cherry, modern light Oak and room-friendly Black Ash. The five speakers share B&W's ubiquitous yellow Kevlar drivers and an all-new 25mm tube-loaded aluminium tweeter that is an updated yet simplified derivative of the famous Nautilus design.

The 684 speaker system presents a crisp and highly-detailed sound. In this application, the Nautilus-derived tweeter is a sweet and extended transducer, making dialogue



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

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and soundtrack nuances highly intelligible and discernable. In our time with the 684 system, we never experienced harshness or treble imbalance even during the loudest and most complex movie sequences. Bullet cartridges emptying and swords clashing had a metallic clang that scarily resembled reality — or at least a sound engineer's version of it.

The 684 package was also capable of presenting a very cohesive and expansive soundfield. It's on this sonic trait that the use of a common driver material — all Kevlar on the midrange/bass units, all aluminium in the tweeters — pays dividends. The five speakers are able to create a seamless soundscape that is high, wide, deep and all-enveloping.

Lastly, to the sub... the ASW10 is a cracker. The EQ and customisation settings make it a snap to match to any reasonable room and avoid the excitation of room modes or extraneous resonances. It provided a powerful bass experience for action blockbusters, but was also subtle, unobtrusive when the soundtrack did not call for it. A bit of an all-rounder, it also performed with a tight, punchy and detailed bass on plain ol' stereo music listening.

The \$4696 B&W 684 theatre package is a well-made, aesthetically-pleasing and superb-sounding system that can really bring your favourite movies to life.

More info: www.e-hifi.com.au