

Why do audiophiles often 'hate' soundbars – is this view right or wrong?

Soundbars were once considered the 'cheap' choice in the audiophile world, but with today's audio technology, this compact device is proving the opposite: convenient, powerful and emotional.

In the audio world, 'audiophile' is a term used to describe those who are passionate about the most faithful sound reproduction, constantly pursuing perfection in detail, soundstage and sound localization. For them, achieving higher fidelity is a never-ending journey – and often comes at a high cost.

On paper, soundbars seem to be the antithesis of all the criteria for an 'audiophile' sound system. As a result, many people believe that if you truly love high-quality sound, you should stay away from soundbars. However, this view may be a bit hasty and biased, because in reality, modern soundbars can absolutely deliver an impressive sound experience - even enough to make even the most demanding people reconsider.

Why do audiophiles 'dislike' soundbars?

There are a few reasons why high-end audiophiles often 'dislike' soundbars. In essence, soundbars are thin and compact devices, designed to be placed directly under the TV or mounted on the wall. With limited size, the acoustic resonance space is narrowed, along with the built-in amplifiers (amps) are smaller and less flexible than separate systems.

The length of a soundbar also limits the ability to separate stereo channels, resulting in a narrower soundstage than a traditional speaker system. While it is possible to use 'virtualization' to expand the space, audio purists often view this as an unacceptable form of 'simulation'.

In addition, soundbars are closed, plug-and-play devices that do not allow users to customize individual components such as amplifiers, DACs, or separate speakers - which is the greatest 'joy' of audiophiles. However, new soundbars are more flexible: users can add a subwoofer or integrate the soundbar into a real surround system as a center channel.

However, in the eyes of many 'pure' audio lovers, soundbars are still seen as a convenient item for ordinary people - less interesting and lacking in 'coolness'.



The soundbar did its job very well.

Like any piece of audio equipment, soundbars have a clear design goal – and most do it well. The engineering behind modern soundbars is truly remarkable.

The biggest problem with soundbars – the lack of deep, powerful bass – can be solved simply by adding a separate subwoofer. Many high-end soundbars even include Dolby Atmos-enabled ceiling speakers, which create a truly immersive spatial effect. Some mid-range models from Samsung, for example, use passive radiators to boost bass in a compact body – a clever alternative to traditional vents.

For those who need to be neat, such as placing the TV on a mobile AV cart, a soundbar with built-in bass is the optimal choice – compact, uniform and free of messy wires.

Audiophile may be wrong

The audiophile community's aversion to soundbars is largely based on a flawed perspective. Soundbars are not a step down from high-end home theater systems, but rather a huge leap in sound quality over built-in TV speakers – while still maintaining the neat, elegant look that people choose slim TVs for.

In fact, almost every TV review concludes that the default sound from a TV is 'good enough' – but can be significantly improved with a good soundbar. For most users, upgrading from TV speakers to a soundbar is a game-changer, and the cost and complexity are much lower than investing in a separate sound system.



The ideal balance

No one is saying a soundbar can replace a perfectly tuned 7.1 system, but a good soundbar strikes a balance between real performance, realistic soundstage and ease of use. This isn't a 'compromise' – it's a smart and impressive optimization.

Audiophiles aren't wrong to say soundbars have limitations, but they're wrong to dismiss their value entirely. New generations of soundbars have proven that smart design and advanced signal processing can deliver sound that exceeds physical size.

In short, while everyone wants a 'comprehensive' sound system with every detail finely tuned, in the real world, a soundbar is still the most reasonable choice 9 times out of 10 – neat, convenient and powerful enough to please even the most demanding ears.

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