

Vandersteen Audio 1C Speaker System

American beauties.



BY STEVE GUTTENBERG

Flat-screen-friendly speakers, iPod-inspired microspeakers, and adorable HTIBs are selling like crazy, but Vandersteen Audio is immune to such flights of fancy. Their speakers are all plus-size beauties—the company's new VCC-5 Reference center channel measures a healthy 24 inches wide, 9.75 high, and 18 deep. So, sure, it would be a hell of a lot easier to sell a slimmer design, but the company's head honcho, Richard Vandersteen, doesn't play that

game. He designs speakers for buyers who care more about sound than fashion. His stuck-in-the-1980s styling isn't a calculated stab at retro—the handsome 1C tower speaker was originally introduced in 1981 as the Model 1, and the "C" iteration debuted in 1996. You see, change for the sake of change isn't an option at Vandersteen Audio, and that extends to bucking the industry stampede to move production offshore. They still build every speaker in Hanford, California, and they test and measure every speaker in their own anechoic chamber. That's commitment.

Breaking All of the Rules

The very first thing you'll notice about the Vandersteens' sound is that it's remarkably open, and, dare I say, it approaches the purity of some high-end electrostatic speakers. The Vandersteens' soundstage depth is positively addictive; the spacious image isn't just wide and deep, it's also taller than average, which adds to the sound's believability. Vandersteen claims that all of their speakers are "time- and phase-accurate." The goal is to more accurately maintain the signals' amplitude and timing relationships than is possible with conventionally designed speakers. Translation: They sound great!

The 1C is, at least by Vandersteen standards, a straightforward effort. When I peered through the non-removable wraparound cloth grille with a flashlight, I spotted a 1-inch alloy dome tweeter sitting in its own mini baffle just above the 8-inch woofer. Spring for the adjustable 1C floor stand, and you'll be able to precisely tilt the speaker back to ensure that the sound from the tweeter and woofer reaches your ears at exactly the same time. If that sounds audiophily overzealous, you've probably never heard a speaker as phase-coherent as a Vandersteen. Please note that the 1C isn't magnetically shielded, so position it at least 10 inches away from a direct-view TV.

Vandersteen developed the VCC-5 Reference center-channel

AT A GLANCE VANDERSTEEN AUDIO 1C SPEAKER SYSTEM



These listings are based on the manufacturer's stated specs; the HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

	••• SUBWOOFER:	V2W	2Wq
Connections:		Two mono line-level inputs: in phase/phase inverted	Stereo speaker level in
Enclosure Type:		Passive radiator	Sealed
Woofers (size in inches, type):		8, fiber cone (3), 12, passive radiator (1)	8, fiber cone (3)
Power Rating (watts):		300, RMS	300, RMS
Crossover Bypass:		Yes	Yes
Available Finishes:		Light Oak, Dark Oak; Other finishes also available	Light Oak, Dark Oak; Other finishes also available
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):		18.5 x 18 x 17	18.5 x 18 x 17
Weight (pounds):		80	80
Price:		\$1,295	\$1,295

••• SPEAKER

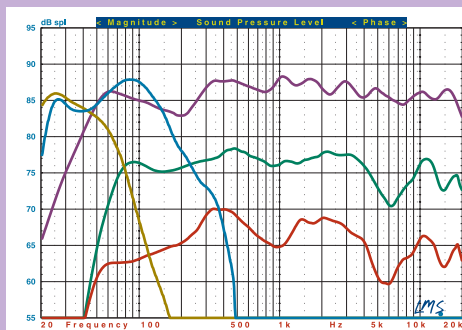
	1C	VCC-5	VSM-1
Type:	Two-way tower	Three-way center	Two-way, surround
Tweeter (size in inches, type):	1, metal-alloy dome	1, metal-alloy dome	1, metal-alloy dome
Midrange (size in inches, type):		6.5, polycone	
Woofers (size in inches, type):	8, die-cast basket with curvilinear polycone	6.5, polycone (2)	6.5, polycone
Nominal Impedance (ohms):	6.8	4	8
Recommended Amp Power:	20–100 watts	100–200 watts	30–100 watts
Available Finishes:	Light Oak, Dark Oak; Other finishes also available	Light Oak, Dark Oak; Other finishes also available	Light Oak, Dark Oak; Other finishes also available
Dimensions (H x W x D, inches):	36 x 12 x 10	24 x 9.75 x 18	23.5 x 12.25 x 5
Weight (pounds):	44	68	31
Price:	\$785/pair	\$1,995	\$949/pair

speaker for use with their top-tier speakers like the 5A and the new Quatro, but it sounded fabulous with the 1C. The VCC-5 is a three-way, point-source design—the idea was to eliminate the lobing effect that horizontally arrayed woofer-tweeter-woofer center speakers can produce. The result: The VCC-5 produces a remarkably consistent sound for on- and off-axis listeners. So, whether you're sitting in the sweet spot or way over on the end of the couch, you hear similar sound from the VCC-5. The speaker's back panel is fitted with a proximity-compensation switch to tame the midbass bloat you'd get if you placed the speaker within a cabinet or on a wall. Each VCC-5 is hand-tweaked to match Vandersteen's original prototype.

The VSM-1 wall-mountable surround speaker stands 23.5 inches tall, making it the biggest surround I've ever seen. Its coaxial driver features a metal-alloy dome tweeter mounted on the acoustic center of a 6.5-inch polycone woofer. Vandersteen claims that the VSM-1 delivers bass down to 60 hertz; that's a lot deeper than a typical shoebox-sized surround speaker. Richard Vandersteen tells me that some folks use VSM-1s up front, as the main left and right speakers, mated with the VCC-1 center speaker.

Vandersteen also sent along two visually identical—but functionally very different—subwoofers: the V2W and 2Wq. That was OK with me because I'm a big fan of using multiple subwoofers. That approach always sounds better—better as in the bass is flatter and smoother. If you have to stick with just one sub, though, I'd opt for the V2W, mostly because its standard LFE input makes it easier to integrate into a home theater system. (The 2Wq uses an

HT Labs Measures: Vandersteen Audio 1C Speaker System



- L/R Sensitivity: **87 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz**
- Center Sensitivity: **85 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz**
- Surround Sensitivity: **85 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz**

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the 1C L/R (purple trace), V2W subwoofer (blue trace), 2Wq subwoofer (yellow trace), VCC-5 center channel (green trace), and VSM surround (red trace). All passive loudspeakers were measured at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

The 1C's listening-window response (a five-point

average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +1.20/-4.19 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. The -3dB point is at 49 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 41 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 6.14 ohms at 9.6 kHz and a phase angle of -49.28 degrees at 69 Hz.

The VCC-5's listening-window response measures +1.33/-6.61 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +1.51/-6.21 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 69 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 61 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.84 ohms at 5.7 kHz and a phase angle of +51.24 degrees at 126 Hz.

The VSM's listening-window response measures +2.97/-7.40 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 133 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 51 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.77 ohms at 13.7 kHz and a phase angle of -45.36 degrees at 96 Hz.

The 2Wq's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 40 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 19 Hz and the -6dB point is at 16 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 60 Hz with the Contour control set to minimum. Please note that since this subwoofer isn't flat to 80 Hz, its response was normalized to 40 Hz.

The V2W's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 52 Hz and the -6dB point is at 22 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 134 Hz.—MJP

outboard passive crossover network that you hook up between your surround processor and power amp.) Both models feature power amps rated at 300 watts and three custom-built, 8-inch long-fiber drivers. Each driver boasts special 1.5-inch, four-layer voice coils engineered to withstand the high temperatures that occur when the sub reproduces room-shaking bass. (The V2W's 8-inch drivers are augmented with a 12-inch passive radiator.) The three 8-inch woofers have the surface area of a single 14-inch woofer. The W2q's most interesting feature is adjustable "Q." You can tune the sub anywhere between flat, highly damped bass and big, bombastic bass, so it will accommodate a wall, corner, or free-space placement. It's a remarkably flexible design.

Getting in Tune

I had to work a bit harder than usual to get the best out of the Vandersteen system, but I didn't mind. The more I tweaked the subs' controls and the speakers' positions in my room, the better the sound. I ran the 1C towers as large speakers in conjunction with the 2Wq sub (as a quasi-three-way system) and the VCC-5 and VSM-1s as small speakers, with my Sunfire Theater Grand III surround processor's bass management set to a 60-Hz crossover

point. Buy your Vandersteens from a good dealer, and they can tell you how to get the best from the speakers in your room.

On their own, the 1Cs can supply gobs of holographic detail. The VCC-5 center solidified the front soundstage's focus in ways that most small centers don't, and its sound really added to the cohesion of the front three channels. Jousts with the *Kill Bill Volume 1* DVD demonstrated the system's home theater chops in a hurry. The Vandersteen subs are quite capable of making you feel the onscreen body blows.

A Film About Jimi Hendrix, a remarkable documentary originally released in 1973, has just made it to DVD, and—man, oh man—it's a trip. Interview snippets with Hendrix, assorted luminaries, and hangers-on are slotted in between sweat-soaked concert performances. I could feel the heat. Considering the age of the film's sound recordings, the quality was far beyond what I expected. "Johnny B. Goode" is a definite standout, and a rare, solo acoustic performance of "Hear My Train a Comin'" gave me chills.

Chesky Records' you-are-there surround SACDs were even better. Baba Olatunji's *Circle of Drums* SACD filled my home theater with African drums. The 360-degree soundfield was palpably real—I swear I could

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Vandersteens roll out a vast soundstage
- Made in sunny California
- Extraordinary deep bass

see the drummers' hands pounding the skins. The SACD's deep bass throbs with an organic pulse, but the Vandersteen subs never crossed the line over to boom or bloat. I felt the beats through my toes.

The Vandersteen system as reviewed here goes for \$6,319, but you can put together a killer 5.1 system with a pair of 1Cs, a VCC-1 center, VSM-1 surrounds, and a V2W sub for \$3,578. That's an astonishing value for an American-built, no-holds-barred music/home theater system. For that kind of money, you'd be hard-pressed to find a set of musical, dynamically alive, spatially coherent speakers or a sub with the V2W's feel-it-in-your-gut bass slam. The contrast between Vandersteen's sound and everybody else's is very real. So, if I've piqued your interest, search out a dealer, bring along some of your favorite CDs and DVDs, and hear the speakers for yourself. You'll be in for a treat! 🎧

VANDERSTEEN AUDIO 1C SPEAKER SYSTEM					OVERALL RATING
Build Quality	Value	Features	Performance	Ergonomics	93
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Real wood veneers ➔ The 1C and VSM-1 feature tweeter-level controls ➔ The VCC-5's complex internal cabinetry is a remarkable achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Vandersteen offers some of the most affordable domestically manufactured high-end speakers you can buy. ➔ Custom finishes are available for a minimal extra cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ You can adjust the subwoofer for tight, lean bass or maximum rumble ➔ The 1C tower, VCC-5 center, and VSM-1 surrounds feature phase-correct crossover designs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ The speakers' holographic soundstaging approaches the state of the art ➔ The sub's impressive bass slam is matched by nimble pitch definition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ The 1C towers aren't shielded, so keep them at least 10 inches from direct-view TVs ➔ The zaftig center speaker may pose placement problems 	
94	92	93	95	82	

General information

1C Tower Speaker, \$785/pair; VCC-5 Reference Center Speaker, \$1,995
 VSM-1 Surround Speaker, \$949/pair; 2Wq Subwoofer, \$1,295; V2W Subwoofer, \$1,295
 Vandersteen, (559) 582-0324, www.vandersteen.com ➔ Dealer Locator Code VDR

If you've got the space to accommodate 'em, Vandersteen's time-tested designs and stubbornly American-made approach produce a huge, highly focused sound.