

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO DACS

Audio Research **DAC 8**

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If you expect to be pampered by design flourishes and treated to exotic features when you spend close to £5000 on a piece of hi-fi - and we'd forgive you if you were - you're going to be rather upset when you take the Audio Research DAC8 from its box.

The casework is best described as workmanlike rather than luxurious. And in terms of connections the only departures from the usual optical, coaxial and USB inputs are the rarer BNC and AES/EBU alternatives. If you're looking for thrills and spills, you're going to have to look deeper than the external design.

And when we say 'look', we really mean 'listen', because it's in the sound department that Audio Research has really set out to impress. Play a 24-bit/192kHz recording of Shostakovich's *Symphony No.11* and the DAC8 delivers an unforced sound of spellbinding subtlety and, when required, brutish power.

A refined, but faithful reproduction

It's a beautifully refined presentation, but one that doesn't smooth over the fine details, and while some rivals highlight details in a more obvious way - which can seem more impressive upon first listen -

Don't let the fairly industrial looks fool you: the DAC8 is superb hi-fi

the DAC8 presents the harmonic information in a more proportioned, musical way.

Add a terrifically spacious soundstage with precisely placed and focused instruments that combine seamlessly to create an expansive, unified whole and you've got something of a hi-fi masterpiece.

Audio Research's 'there's only one reference' tagline might be pushing it just a touch, but it certainly has the quality to back up the bold claims.

TECH SPECS

USB in 1 • Coax digital in 1 • Optical digital in 1 • RCA in 0 • RCA out 1 • XLR out 1 • Optical digital out 0 • Coaxial digital out 0 • Headphone 0 • Wireless No Finishes 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 13 x 48 x 25cm



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Authoritative and bold, yet subtle and refined; lots of detail; expansive soundstage

AGAINST Not an enticing looker; not a huge number of connections for the money

VERDICT The styling won't excite, but the sound quality certainly will

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