



PRO-JECT ELEMENTAL

Pro-Ject's Heinz Lichtenegger grew tired of customers (and retailers) too dense to follow instructions – broken styli, missing tonearm counterweights and so on. He designed the Elemental to be idiot-proof and cost effective. Complete with arm and cartridge, the Elemental takes away all the pain of setting up a record deck, working straight out of the box. It is also available with USB for uploading LPs to a computer. What also comes free is its looks, which are so ultra-modern you won't believe the LP was introduced in 1948.

project-audio.com



THE JOURNAL

THE GEAR: RECORD PLAYERS

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Words by Mr Ken Kessler, audio expert and journalist

Media reports suggest that 66 years after the format was introduced, the vinyl LP is enjoying a renaissance. In truth the convenience of streaming music through wirelessly connected speakers is almost irresistible, but that takes nothing away from the appeal of old-fashioned records. LPs - those 12" slabs of vinyl also know as "long-players" and "records" - continue to appeal for a variety of reasons.

The first is that they are big enough to come in handsome, often lavish, 12x12" card sleeves so you can study the artwork and read the liner notes. Not that we'd recommend it, but some people are even said to use gatefold sleeves as a perfect surface for rolling joints (the fold catches the crumbs).

But most importantly LPs sound better than any digital format. Music is analogue - digital formats chop it into bits and it cannot be reassembled to its original state. Think of a jigsaw puzzle: regardless of how few or many pieces there are, the original design will be spoiled by the visible cuts between each segment.

Digital playback has improved considerably since the late 1970s and early 1980s, but any "golden-eared" audiophile will tell you that digital playback inserts far too much processing between the recording and the sound that comes out of your speakers or headphones. And you can hear it. Ever since hi-fi began, the goal has been to make reproduced music sound real, and while analogue approximates reality, digital can only be artificial. Period.

LPs are played on a record deck that consists of a motor turning a platter, rotating at 33 1/3rpm (or 45rpm for singles). An arm on a pivot holds a stylus that follows the groove in the record's surface. Turntables plug into an amplifier through something called a phono stage, because the signal is too low to use the same sockets as CD players or other sound sources. Happily this needn't be an expensive exercise: record decks worth owning start at around £150, phono stages at £50, and the records themselves are available for as little as 50p at your local charity shop.

For six of the best turntables, click through the slides, *above*.

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