

“... they give Paradigm a

**COMPETITIVE EDGE ...**”

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*“There is no question in my mind (or to my ears) that I made the right choice in selecting Paradigm’s SA-35s.”*

by Neal T. Melden

#### DISCOVERING A NEW PARADIGM

I was expecting two separate boxes. So when the FedEx guy only delivered a single box, I asked the driver if there was another one. As he caught his breath he sputtered. “This one was heavy enough.”

Printed on the box, in large blue letters, was “Paradigm Reference.” Beneath, in much smaller letters, was “SA-35 Contains One Pair.” Still, most in-wall speakers are not that heavy. When I opened the carton, I realized why these in-walls were heftier than most: The face piece is made of finely finished heavy-gauge aluminum, as are the mounting brackets (which are two thick, separate pieces) surrounding the entire perimeters of the back. No wonder the box was heavy.

I couldn’t wait to have them installed. I had planned to replace my existing in-wall speakers, which are mediocre at best, with the Paradigms. But I recently changed my mind because I realized, after all these years, I was no longer a two channel guy. After spending numerous

**Right out of the carton, the kit is quite straightforward. The grille covers are the only items that need to be assembled.**



hours listening to music on my “big system” downstairs, I had become addicted to surround sound. The only remedy was to make all of my home’s listening areas (I have three of them) surround-sound havens.

My installer made a weekend visit. He knew his stuff and commenced marking off the area in which they would reside on my bedroom wall. Soon he was cutting two holes in the exact size of the Paradigm template that was included in the package. I was watching carefully, like any new parent would.

Next, he removed the baseboard, cut two small holes below the baseboard level and strung the speaker cable inside the wall cavity, carefully fishing it through each hole. Then he tucked the wire below the wall and reattached the baseboard. The wiring was that easy.

Paradigm’s heavy-duty metal bracing came in handy. The braces are attached to the faceplate by four screws and are

designed to hinge inward when not tightened. This allows flexibility for the braces to be slipped into the wall cavities. As the installer tightened the screws, the braces nestled into the correct position, clamping the speakers to the wall.

The cavities inside the walls of our homes act as sound chambers, much the same as a speaker cabinet. The cross braces between the vertical studs in our walls act as the top and bottom of the sound chamber. This fact has been used to great advantage by all in-wall speaker manufacturers. I selected Paradigm because I like the sound quality, which was a subjective choice at best. There are several other high-quality in-wall speaker brands available. To confuse things more, it's hard to tell what an in-wall speaker will really sound like until after it has been installed in its final position. This is why you should rely on experienced firms that will give you honest advice.

#### DETERMINING QUALITY

Now, how do you know if your in-wall speaker, or for that matter any speaker, produces great audio quality? John Kloss, one of the pioneers of modern speakers as well as projection televisions, used to point to his eyes and say "these are very smart!" Then he would point to his ears and say, "these are very dumb!" The



**Cleverly designed clamps fit into the opening. When tightened (by the plate screws) you have enough holding strength for four speakers.**

sad fact is that only a few people out of a hundred have a great sense of sound. Several others have a good sense of sound quality. And about 50% of all adults have hearing problems.

DVD sound effects (like cannons and whizzing bullets) are poor barometers for judging speaker quality. Music, especially orchestral pieces with well-defined passages and solos, tells the real audio story. Keep this in mind when you audition home theater speakers. They should be as good with music as they are with sound effects and the spoken word. Of course, for your primary entertainment room, you will need the center channel and subwoofer (which I don't have for my in-wall music system).

Like many home owners, I have in-wall speakers because the room does not lend itself to free-standing or bookshelf speakers. Visual aesthetics are important to me. I am too finicky to contend with speaker boxes mounted on walls. I also detest those little cube speakers that are supposed to be unnoticed when they hang from the ceiling like security cameras.

There are two schools of thought about the aesthetic appearance of in-wall speakers. The most popular one is that the speakers should blend (as much as possible) into the wall. The second notion is that the speakers should be seen and heard. Several manufacturers (like Legacy) make in-wall speakers that not only protrude from the wall, but display large wood facing and grilles that call attention to themselves. Personally, I subscribe to the notion that in-wall speakers should look like part of the wall. For this reason, I had the frames and metal grille covers of my Paradigm SA-35s painted the same color as my wall. You can still see them but all eyes see the large abstract painting between the speaker grilles first.

Technology has, in the last few years, made quantum leaps in delivering more realistic and accurate audio. Today's smaller speakers can easily outperform many larger and more expensive ones that you may have bought as recently as five years ago. In-wall speakers produce a level of quality that a mere decade ago was deemed impossible to achieve.

There is no question in my mind (or to my ears) that I made the right choice in selecting Paradigm's SA-35s. In my opinion, they give Paradigm a competitive edge—as long as they don't rest on their laurels. There is no such thing in the speaker business as "being at the top of your game." There is no top, but there is a bottom, and it's littered with many brands that are long forgotten.

