

# Music Tools IsoShelf

English translation of the SUONO article • March 2002 • by Mario Berlinguer

## COMPLEMENTS & ACCESSORIES

Music Tools' mission is to create products with a high technical content that at the same time serve as elements of interior design. Davide Bastianelli, an architect by profession, has looked for simple solutions to what is, ultimately, also a simple problem, whatever the audio gurus may say: finding a place for electronics within the furnishings, and making sure that this "place" allows them to perform as well as possible, without promising miracles and without concealing the technical choices behind it. The "primary" elements always remain the equipment the tables are intended to accommodate and, of course, the music that equipment is supposed to reproduce.

But even at first glance, Music Tools tables are anything but unremarkable, and it is clear that they are important components. They are beautiful—you may remember the magnificent IsoTable reviewed in SUONO a few months ago, with its metallic finish, its multi-layer glass shelves, and its complex, functional spike system. IsoTable is a rather expensive product that allows maximum performance and, visually, is also a strongly characterized furnishing element.

Music Tools, however, does not limit itself to a "top" product intended for the most ambitious systems. Rather, it offers a fairly complete range, both of tables and loudspeaker stands, that can be used with systems starting in the mid-range or even lower-mid-range, because any system can be improved by a good supporting base.

There are three stands. Tool One is the flagship (€599.10) and is specifically intended for LS 3/5A loudspeakers, although there is nothing to prevent its use with loudspeakers of similar size and characteristics. Entasis (€346.00) is the model that best represents the company's technical philosophy: a cylindrical tubular structure, adjustable spikes, and the possibility of filling the inside of the tube with damping material. Fultur (€216.90) is intended for less demanding loudspeakers (a particularly tall version is very well suited to home-theater surround speakers), and consists of three fillable uprights.

The choice is even broader when it comes to tables. Starting with the least expensive model, there is Alicia, which is something of a category of its own in the Music Tools catalog. Although it was designed for audio and audio-video applications, it does not look like a particularly technical table (despite its rigid, deformation-resistant structure, adjustable spikes, and very thick shelves), but rather like a furnishing element, thanks to the beauty of its wooden shelves, available in Canadian maple or American cherry, and the elegant simplicity of its lines. If you have seen it in photographs, know that the photographs do not do it justice.

It is produced in two versions: a "wide" version for accommodating a large number of components, and a more traditional version. Prices, which also vary according to the number of shelves (two, three, or four), range from €562.93 to €852.15. These are reasonable prices when compared with the cost of high-quality furnishing elements of the kind these tables represent.

The more technical tables are those in the Iso series, which put Bastianelli's principal ideas into practice: three tubular supports with spikes, a multilayer anti-resonant glass shelf, and, above all, a completely modular structure. The individual pieces are in fact listed separately, shelf by shelf, allowing each person to assemble the table according to their own requirements.

I will not dwell on the IsoStatic and IsoStatic Reference series, which our readers already know, and which differ mainly in the greater dimensions of the latter compared with the former. I will mention, however, that in addition to the shelves designed to form multiple units, tables are also available specifically designed to support large power amplifiers directly on the floor—something that is necessary in many cases.

This is a particularly useful solution, since even very heavy and massive power amplifiers can benefit from the effects of a good supporting surface with spikes, while aesthetically they become much

more acceptable.

The IsoStatic series is nevertheless made up of expensive products, so for those whose system is not at the same level, it is advisable to consider the series reviewed in this issue. Although it cannot be called inexpensive, it provides many of the technical and aesthetic advantages of IsoStatic at less than half the cost.

It is simply called IsoShelf, and it is made according to exactly the same criteria and with the same materials; the only difference is that the components are smaller and lighter. The dimensions are 48 cm deep by 60 cm wide (42 cm and 50 cm respectively for the usable surface), while heights of 17, 25, or 30 cm can be selected according to requirements.

Its load capacity is lower than that of the IsoStatic, and goes from 120 kg per shelf down to 60 kg.

## **Music Tools IsoShelf**

Anyone who is not forced, for reasons of space, to place their system on an existing piece of furniture (the classic large cabinet) is quite reasonably faced with the question of how to resolve the conflict between sonic performance and protecting their furnishings. In other words, how to reconcile the demands of the ear with those of the eye. In this respect, Music Tools offers some of the most interesting solutions.

## Music Tools IsoShelf Table

Since there are not many components weighing 60 or 120 kg, this specification gives an idea of the rigidity and robustness of these tables. The structure is the same as that of the IsoStatic: each shelf has three tubular-steel legs, with the sockets for the spikes of the shelf above and the spikes used to transfer the load to the floor or the shelf below located respectively above and below each leg.

The legs are interconnected by corresponding steel bars, this time square in section. The whole assembly is filled and tuned, I imagine with the same material (Filler) that Music Tools identified and made available to SUONO readers through the SUONOpaint program. The structure is finished in black, with an oven-baked sound-insulating plastic coating.

A glass shelf rests on each of these structures, “virtually” supported by three spikes. At the rear, there are actually two support points, but they are very close together because of the closing of the triangle formed by the steel bars. I think Music Tools preferred this solution to inserting an additional metal bar on which a single central spike could be mounted, since that would have created greater elasticity and therefore less rigidity than the solution adopted.

The glass slab is double-layer, anti-resonant glass (the IsoStatic uses triple-layer glass). Regarding the method of supporting the glass on the structure, it is possible to choose adjustable spikes (supplied on request, with appropriately sized spike discs) or the supplied rubber feet. Alternatively, of course, the user can employ whatever spikes they prefer, but the Music Tools spikes screw perfectly into the sockets occupied by the rubber feet once the latter are removed.

The choice between spikes and rubber feet depends on the type of equipment to be placed on the shelf. First, for obvious reasons of weight; second, for sonic reasons. A particularly heavy piece of equipment, such as a large power amplifier, will probably compress the rubber feet to the point where spikes are unnecessary.

There is also a still fairly widespread belief that not all equipment—especially mid-range equipment—sounds good on glass shelves, particularly with spikes. Marantz and Teac, two names that come to mind, are among those that, according to some people, prefer to sound on more traditional shelves, perhaps even without spikes (and in some cases I have verified that this is true). The possibility of leaving the rubber feet in place also solves this problem. In any case, I recommend having at least one set of spikes available for experimentation.

The upper shelf is obviously very well suited to sources, whether analog or digital, while the lower shelves can accommodate electronics, preamplifiers and power amplifiers, or integrated amplifiers.

As for using additional spikes between the equipment and the shelves, I carried out some tests and found that the improvement is not as noticeable as with other tables. Evidently, the effectiveness of the IsoShelf is such that the use of additional devices is not indispensable. This observation should nevertheless be taken with a grain of salt, since, as we know, these things vary from component to component.

The only drawback of the IsoShelf (and also of its larger brother, the IsoStatic) is that the central rear leg can make connections difficult in certain cases, with those monoblock power amplifiers whose input or output is positioned centrally. If you have one of the relatively few amplifiers with this characteristic, all you can do is shift it slightly off-center, as I did.

In the listening test, the IsoShelf performs splendidly. A greater solidity and precision in the bass is immediately apparent; the bass is much better controlled and apparently deeper and more defined. The image gains unmistakable stability and depth, and the sensation of illusion increases.

Detail definition is more evident and, contrary to what is usually thought about glass shelves, although the transparency of the sound also seems to increase, there is absolutely no trace of that sense of coldness that many people, myself included, attribute to this type of material.

On the contrary, paradoxically, I seem to hear a slight increase in sweetness as well, as I noticed when listening to some records that are generally a little “acidic” but which, under these

circumstances, sounded surprisingly pleasant.

Although selectivity and analytical ability therefore increase, the IsoShelf does not make the sound unpleasantly “X-rayed”; in this respect it demonstrates great musicality.

Its effect is, in short, a clear improvement in the parameters that usually improve with any good equipment table, but in this case the improvement seems much more obvious and free of any drawbacks. It is therefore a table that is “better” than a good table, which is admirable.

I will leave the aesthetic judgment to you; to me, it seems very elegant.

## **Photo captions**

1. In this photograph, one of the rubber feet can be seen in the background, and on the frontmost crossbar, its socket after removal. The socket is threaded to accept the adjustable spikes.
2. The table should not be assembled this way, but the photograph illustrates the possible replacement of the rubber feet with adjustable conical spikes.
3. At left, the conical feet supplied with each shelf. They rest either on the floor or, for the upper shelves, in the sockets located on the upper surface, visible at right.
4. The side sections are stacked one on top of another using metal spikes that fit into dedicated sockets.
5. One of the multilayer glass shelves resting on the rubber feet.
6. The spikes are accompanied by metal discs to protect the glass. The result, including visually, is decidedly successful.

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Prices: shelves are sold separately at €237.57 each; the version with adjustable spikes facing the supporting surface is sold for €289.22.

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