

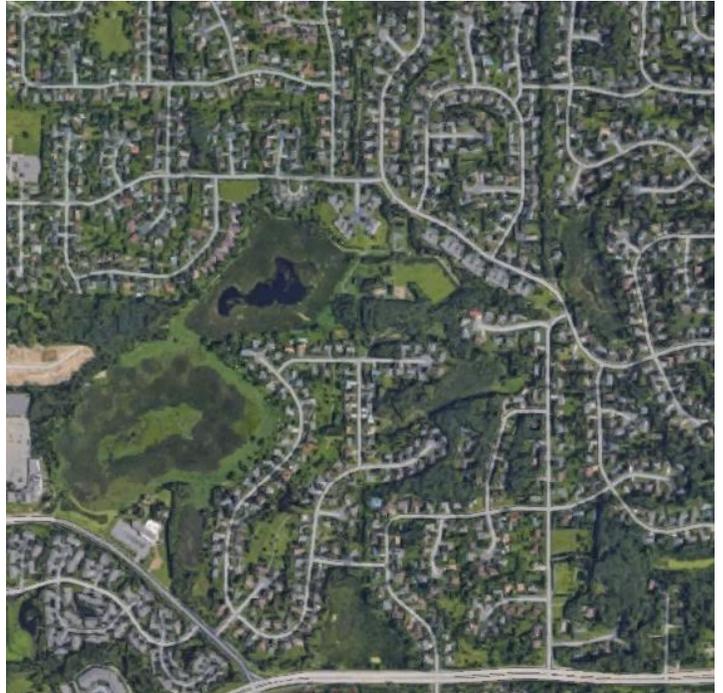
Taming the great American suburban listening room

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Chances are if you are an audiophile dwelling in American suburbia, you are grappling with what is known as the dreaded sheet-rocked echo chamber monster. It must be vanquished for your music to survive.

Let's get one thing out of the way first: If you have a big flat-screen TV planted on the back-wall smack between your speakers and expect to achieve anywhere near maximum performance from your stereo, you need to rethink the situation. At least cover the thing with a cloth to minimize reflections off of it when listening if it must coexist with your music system.

Those with a listening space having unsealed brick back walls or walls that are lined with a vast expanse of bookcases actually filled with books count among the lucky few. Walls like these tend to disperse rear firing speaker energy in a marvelously random way that causes the clouds to part, the heavens to open and your stereo to sing with nary a hint of imaging congestion.



So, what to do if you have a panoramic half-acre of unadorned sheetrock staring out from behind your stereo?

One of the mistakes I see is the overreaction to over damp this great expanse with a gigantic music sucking tapestry or drape of monstrous proportions. Hanging some flimsy posters or a painting dead center does next to nothing to calm the sonic storm raging behind your rig.

What does seem to work, in my experience, is staggering absorptive floor standing vertical panels that are about 4' to 6' H x 6" - 8" W at about 2' to 3' intervals on center. Adjust how close they are to each other to achieve the desired not-too-dead, not-too-live spectral balance in your space. The ones I use came from ASC. Or, you can try building your own with strips made from thin fiberglass, wool/felt, upholstery or filtration batting material with a thin wooden frame around them for support and a fabric covering.

The adjustable, staggered dead/live/dead/live intervals of this damping treatment, which you may extend around your room's periphery as needed, work nicely to mimic the natural mixing of sound that occurs in a more ideal room – say one with more inert lath and plaster walls and a judiciously arranged mix of appropriately dense wood and cloth furnishings about the space.

It's simply about transforming your listening room into a more tranquil, neutral zone that's not fighting your music.