

# THE SOUND OF CHANGE

AS BRITISH AUDIO TITANS BOWERS & WILKINS CELEBRATES 50 YEARS AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME, DANIELLE DE WOLFE MEETS THE COMPANY'S BRAND DIRECTOR, DANNY HAIKIN, TO TALK INNOVATION, DESIGN, AND VIRTUAL REALITY

"If you can make a better product, then you will sell it." It's a seemingly innocuous sentence laid out by Bowers & Wilkins founder, John Bowers, yet one that stands as a constant point of reference for the high-end British audio brand.

2016 has been somewhat of a milestone for the company, marking half a century of sonic superiority in the midst of an ever-evolving audio industry. It's an anniversary that hasn't gone uncelebrated. Their ongoing partnership with The House of St Barnabas has produced 'Fifty days of music' - a unique listening experience featuring their 800 D3 loudspeakers, alongside intimate Q&A sessions curated by a variety of influential guests. The year has also seen them delve into the realm of virtual

reality. Events such as Bjork's highly-immersive Bjork Digital experience at Somerset House have allowed the brand to connect directly with artists and individuals who feel passionate about sound. Simply put, 2016 has exposed Bowers & Wilkins to a wider audience than ever before.

It goes without saying that remaining at the forefront of innovation is a competitive business. Recent years have seen the brand shift focus, expanding from luxury audio separates - their traditional field of dominance - into the heavily-saturated wireless speaker and

headphone markets. It's a move that hasn't come without risk, however, pairing the brand's penchant for high-end design with their history of audio excellence has enabled them to successfully mirror the change in consumer demand.

"The iPod created a new category of products for us," remarks Brand Director, Danny Haikin. "The music industry is a very anarchic business. Most of the things that have become successful were either accidental or the opposite of what the industry demanded. Look at MP3s and MP4s, they were things everyone tried to prevent happening - except for apple."

The industry's change of direction was rapid. "Twenty to thirty-year-olds were no longer demanding separates and had no interest in the traditional

compact disk," Haikin notes. Combining their reputation for sleek yet functional design with the increasing popularity of digital downloading and online streaming, the brand hoped to re-establish themselves as staples among this younger demographic.

And so marked the dawn of the Zeppelin. With its ground-breaking elliptical shape and sleek, minimalist aesthetic, Bowers & Wilkins was transformed into a household name more or less overnight. "I think the fact it looked so cool and sounded so good made it a runaway success. There was nothing else like it," admits Haikin. "We sell hundreds of







WE PREPARE OURSELVES TO MAKE THE BEST PRODUCT WE POSSIBLY CAN



Previous:  
Exceptional design creates incredible sound

This page, clockwise from left:  
The 800 D3 speaker; The P9 Signature headphones; The original Signature Diamond speaker, designed by Sir Kenneth Grange

thousands – and we’d never sold hundreds of thousands of anything before.”

Morten Warren was the designer at the helm. Having joined Bowers & Wilkins in 1989, he began working side-by-side with Sir Kenneth Grange – a powerful design force in his own right. It remains an exclusive club, one that establishes the pair amongst a group of only three industrial designers across the history of the brand. “Morten is an extremely gifted designer – probably England’s most talented product designer,” confesses Haikin. “He’s taken the brand to a place I don’t think Kenneth could have done, but a lot of things he’s created are things that Kenneth initiated.”

Warren hailed a new design era for the brand, with the Zeppelin being his most notable creation. Like any successful innovation, the Zeppelin’s design has evolved over the years to incorporate new technological advancements, such as Bluetooth, Apple Airplay and Spotify. What remains the same, however, is the brand’s desire to achieve the very best in both audio output and impeccable design. “We prepare ourselves to make the best product we possibly can,” states Haikin.

To coincide with their fiftieth anniversary, the brand have launched new P9 Signature headphones, further expanding their footprint within the portable audio market. “The P9 Signature is unique, we’d never made anything at that level of opulence before,” admits Haikin. “Obviously, one does things like that on an anniversary. There are an awful



lot of elements involved in these headphones – it really is a beautiful piece of design.”

The P9 model features newly-designed drivers, angled to deliver a sound closer to that experienced in real world. Team this thoughtful piece of engineering with a headband and magnetic earcups crafted from Italian Saffiano leather, and it’s clear to see no expense has been spared in their creation.

“Some companies produce a product that has a poor relationship to the original idea,” states Haikin. “What we produce is hugely tasteful – we’ve got great taste which a lot of companies don’t have.” Whether down to taste, talent or a combination of the two, Bowers & Wilkins’ desire to seamlessly marry form and function is what will continue to define them well into their fifty-first year. ●

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