

Test Bench

BY Michael Fremer

Sonus faber Venere 2.5 Speaker System

PRICE: \$5,493 **AT A GLANCE:** Shapely Italian styling • Large speaker, big sound • Exceptional soundstaging

Tasty Italian-German-Asian Fusion

Could this sleek, lacquer-finished, curvaceous new Sonus faber Venere loudspeaker have originated anywhere other than in Italy? Well, no and yes. With its soothing, elegant

curves and glossy finish, Venere whispers “Italy,” but the scant \$1,249 price tag of this 43-

pound, 3.5-foot floorstander shouts “China.”

In fact, this new Sonus faber speaker is truly an international product. It was designed in-house at Sonus faber’s Arcugnano factory near Venice, Italy—a building as stylish as the designs

emanating therefrom—using bespoke drivers designed by Sonus faber.

The midwoofer and woofer cone material is curv, a proprietary self-reinforcing 100-percent polypropylene composite manufactured by Germany-based Propex, while the dome tweeter is of silk over which is applied a multi-layered Sonus-spec’d coating manufactured by DKM in Germany. Final driver production is done in China. The complex cabinets of gloss-lacquer-coated MDF are also manufactured in China, which is where final speaker assembly takes place.

Treading Lightly

With a reputation at stake for visually stunning, superb,



• The stand-mounted two-way 1.5 features a 6-inch version of the curv-coned woofer and the 1-inch tweeter.

• Sumiko supplied a compact REL T-7 subwoofer to complete the system.



SPECS

SPEAKER:	VENERE 2.5	VENERE CENTER	VENERE 1.5
TYPE:	2.5-way, tower	Two-way, center	Two-way, monitor
TWEETER (SIZE IN INCHES, TYPE):	1, silk dome	1, silk dome	1, silk dome
WOOFER (SIZE IN INCHES, TYPE):	7 curv cone (2)	5.25, Nomex cone (2)	6, curv cone
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE (OHMS):	6	6	6
RECOMMENDED AMP POWER (WATTS):	40-250	30-150	30-150
AVAILABLE FINISHES:	Gloss White, Gloss Black	Gloss White, Gloss Black	Gloss White, Gloss Black
DIMENSIONS (W X H X D, INCHES):	13.4 x 43.6 x 17.2	19.7 x 8.8 x 11.5	8.2 x 15.6 x 11.9
WEIGHT (POUNDS):	43	21	13.3
PRICE:	\$2,498/pair	\$798	\$1,198/pair

furniture-grade build quality, and delicate, graceful, high-resolution sonics, Sonus faber treaded cautiously before building a new entry-level speaker line in China. The partnering Chinese company was carefully chosen. Chinese personnel were trained in Italy, and Italian technicians and carpenters were relocated to China to man technical offices established at the various plants that produce the component parts and do the final assembling and testing.

Some purists will grouse that this move dilutes the Sonus faber brand, but they are living in a naive dreamworld. The company will still produce its premium products in Italy, including the \$120,000 limited-edition Aida that was the inspiration for this line. The new arrangement allows Sonus faber to compete more effectively in the entry level by bringing to market products at price points inconceivable were they built in Italy.

Everything about these speakers, from the packaging to the elegant design to the attention paid to the smallest detail will be familiar to longtime Sonus faber enthusiasts. For them, nothing will have changed other than the

price point. For first-time buyers, especially the younger ones the company hopes to attract, the experience, even before first listen, will remind them of the presentation of another product manufactured in China but designed elsewhere, say in Cupertino, California.

The Venere Line

The Venere line will eventually consist of two floorstanders, two stand-mount speakers, a center, and a wall-mount speaker. The larger 3.0 floorstander and 2.0 stand-mount speakers were not available for review, but the system reviewed here—a pair of 2.5s (\$2,498/pair), a pair of 1.5s (\$1,198/pair), and the Center (\$798)—add up to a total price of just under \$4,500 or around \$1,500 less than Sonus faber's Toy tower system I reviewed a few years ago (*Home Theater*, May 2009).

While the boxy Toy, with its leather side "cheeks" was stylish, the lyre-shaped 2.5 in gloss black is an absolutely gorgeous-looking loudspeaker. Though it's a few inches shorter than the Toy, the 2.5's sculpted, curvaceous, seamless cabinet makes it appear both larger and at the same time

more room-friendly. To paraphrase John Lennon, it's so good-looking, it's so hard to see.

Sonus faber paid great attention to every stylish detail: The glass top plate slopes gently down toward the listener, while the sculpted, curved-arch front baffle angles back thanks to the construction of the bolt-on baseplate. A magnetically attached curved grille braced with a visible honeycomb insert fits within a

baffle recess to produce a smooth surface that meets the foam-filled front port surface—the speaker's only non-glossy accent.

But enough about the aesthetics: As the guy in the Men's Wearhouse commercials says, you're gonna *like* the way these speakers look.

The Guts

The 2.5 sports three drivers in a 2.5-way configuration: a



• The Venere Center features a pair of individually front-ported 6-inch woofers and a 1-inch tweeter in a WTW configuration.



HT Labs Measures

SONUS FABER VENERE 2.5 SPEAKER SYSTEM

L/R Sensitivity:
90 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

Center Sensitivity:
90.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

Surround Sensitivity:
83 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the Venere 2.5 L/R (purple trace), Venere Center center channel (green trace), Venere 1.5 surround (red trace), and REL T-7 subwoofer (blue trace). All passive loudspeakers were measured with grilles at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input and scaled for display purposes.

The Venere 2.5's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +2.65/-8.17 decibels from 200 hertz

to 10 kilohertz. The -3-dB point is at 52 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 39 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 4.49 ohms at 111 Hz and a phase angle of -38.19 degrees at 76 Hz.

The Venere Center's listening-window response measures +1.73/-6.13 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +1.31/-6.07 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3-dB point is at 82 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 64 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 3.84 ohms at 8.9 kHz and a phase angle of -33.79 degrees at 2.5 kHz.

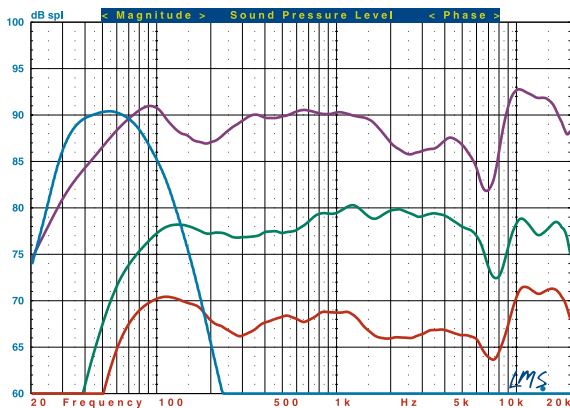
The Venere 1.5's listening-window response measures +2.50/-4.30 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3-dB point is at 61 Hz, and the -6-dB point is at 54 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 6.78 ohms at 162 Hz and a phase angle of -29.17 degrees at 103 Hz.

The REL T-7's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3-dB point is at 32 Hz and the -6-dB point is at 28 Hz. The upper -3-dB point is at 98 Hz using the LFE input with the Crossover control set to maximum.—MJP

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on the web

SONUS FABER VENERE 2.5 SPEAKER SYSTEM



front-ported 7-inch woofer low-pass-filtered at 250 hertz; a second 7-inch woofer that's low-pass-filtered at 2.5 kilohertz; and the 1-inch treated, silk-dome tweeter. The stand-mounted two-way 1.5s used here as surrounds (but I bet four of them would make a great surround system, too) feature a 6-inch version of the curv-coned

woofer and the 1-inch tweeter. It, too, is front-ported to increase placement flexibility. The Venere Center features a pair of individually front-ported 6-inch woofers and a 1-inch tweeter in a WTW configuration. Both the 2.5 and 1.5 are equipped with dual sets of high-quality binding posts for either biwiring or biamping.



• The REL T-7 allows a direct injection from the amplifier taps along with the LFE line-level signal.

REL T-7 Subwoofer
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★★

American Sonus faber importer Sumiko supplied a compact REL T-7 subwoofer (\$999) to complete the system.

Big Sound (After Long Break-In)!

Those who don't believe in break-in, and there are many, will not be happy with what they first hear, and because they don't believe, they will be done. Cold out of the box, the system was bright. Any dealer putting this system on display before a thorough break-in is making a big mistake. Normally, Sumiko breaks in review speakers, but deadlines prevented it this time. To speed up the break-in, I let the system percolate for a week whenever I wasn't using it for pleasure (even cold, it brought plenty!).

Over time, the tweeter calmed down and better integrated with the other drivers. I used the same CDs to measure the progress, and

SPECS **SPECS REL T-7**
SUBWOOFER
ENCLOSURE TYPE: Passive radiator
WOOFER (SIZE IN INCHES, TYPE): 8, (10, passive radiator) **RATED POWER (WATTS):** 200, RMS **CONNECTIONS:** Speaker-level (Neutrik), line-level LFE, low-level (RCA) **CROSSOVER BYPASS:** No **AVAILABLE FINISHES:** Black, White **DIMENSIONS (W X H X D, INCHES):** 12 x 12.72 x 12.8 **WEIGHT (POUNDS):** 34 **PRICE:** \$999

the differences over time were not subtle. When it was time to write this, the balance was much improved and easily ready for prime time. Will it improve further? I don't know. However, this system definitely sounded better with the Marantz AV7005's Audyssey MultEQ turned off. Anyway, in my opinion, speaker reviews should ideally be carried out with an unequalized signal.

Even after break-in, it's clear that this new Sonus system has been voiced for a new generation's sonic tastes; that is, at least if you subscribe to the classic stereo-types. If the big, expensive Sonus speakers veer toward the sweetness and delicacy audio-



• The sub produced a coherent, room-filling, three-dimensional bubble.

philes prefer, the Veneres exhibit a smooth but slightly forward tonal balance. In my room, the 2.5s did not produce a great deal of deep bass. Combine that with a slight upper mid/high-frequency projection, and clearly, to fully balance the sound, you need to carefully engage a subwoofer—one like the REL T-7 that allows a direct injection from the amplifier taps along with the LFE line-level signal. The pre/pro's channel-leveling test tone demonstrates the center's more forward balance, and I found it better to drop the center level a few decibels from what the SPL meter said.

So configured and carefully balanced, this system sounded both creamy-smooth and quite capable of *rocking out*! I watched Paul McCartney's performance of "The End" at last year's Grammys on D-VHS tape. It's become a benchmark for me. First off, this system produces a notably *big* sonic picture, especially the Venere Center. Abe Laboriel's kick drum had both forward thrust and texture, and it shook my large living room—as it should in a stadium, while McCartney's voice was cleanly rendered and the electric guitars (Broooce, Joe

Walsh, Dave Grohl, and Sir Paul) had appropriately wiry bite. The overall sound on this track compared more than favorably with the far more expensive McIntosh system I recently reviewed (*Home Theater*, June 2012).

I watched, among other films, the talky, sexually creepy, and critically underappreciated *J. Edgar* and found that the Venere Center rendered dialogue with great clarity while avoiding overly crispy sibilants. While far more expensive center speakers can deliver more texturally nuanced dialogue with greater in-room believability, the Venere Center avoided the lumpy congestion and nasality that some modestly priced centers exhibit. The Center was good enough to forget.

Back to music, the PBS broadcast of the Carole King/James Taylor special recorded at The Troubadour in Los Angeles again demonstrated the 2.5's superb clarity, transient cleanliness, and freedom from distracting colorations. The piano's attack was more or less correct, being only slightly on the hard side, which is preferable to soft and rhythmically mushy,

while Taylor's guitar and the drummer's rimshots and cymbals were subtly and pleasingly accentuated. While Taylor's vocals had a slightly accentuated sibilance on this soundtrack, the balance of mouth and body was nearly ideal and produced a believable presentation.

Here, as with the McIntosh system, the designers chose to moderate the lower-frequency extension, but the system's size means it can produce impressive dynamics no small two-way box can manage. The subwoofer is then used to supplement the lowest octaves. The new, treated, silk-dome tweeter's subjectively wide, smooth dispersion produces a coherent, room-filling, three-dimensional bubble free of speaker-localizing beaming.

The system can play loud without strain, produces wide dynamics, and as I discovered when my significant other forced me to turn it down late one night, sounds clean and uncongested at very low SPLs. Arguably, it attains even greater transparency, coherence, and tonal balance at low levels—not that it's anything less than impressive when cranked for sound-effects-heavy movies.

Conclusion

Stunning looks, superb build quality, superior fit and finish, and impressive sonics combine here to produce an affordable speaker line that lives up to Sonus faber's reputation for stylish industrial design and sophisticated high-resolution sound.

If you like sound that's soft, warm, and on the lush side, the Venere's balance might not appeal, but if you prefer clean, taut, and detailed—in the same mold as the big McIntosh system as I recall it but for a great deal less money—this is an exciting and musically convincing must-hear system.

The 2.5's 6-ohm impedance and rated 89-dB efficiency should make it a relatively easy speaker to drive even with a low-powered A/V receiver, but given its revealing balance, driving it with cheap electronics might not produce the desired results. As with many smaller speakers, the stand-mounted 1.5's rated 85-dB sensitivity means it will require more power to perform at its



• The 2.5 sports three drivers in a 2.5-way configuration.

best. Driven by my Parasound Halo A 51 five-channel amp, the speakers clearly lived up to their full sonic potential. The better the electronics, the better the Venere system will likely sound.

OK, admittedly \$4,500 is not chump change (almost \$5,500 with the REL subwoofer), but only a chump could look, touch, and listen to this system and conclude it wasn't a remarkable value. It will be music-listening and movie-watching time and money well spent. Highly recommended. **Ⓔ**

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