



A cocktail bar-cum-listening room by Spinocchia Freund, with fabric-wrapped acoustic wall panels. **Right** A space in a Hackney home designed by Studio George for a record collector and music lover



Second kitchens and cinemas? Forget it! The new at-home status symbol is the listening room, says **Nicky Rampley-Clarke**

When you've got the walk-in pantry, the dressing room and the reformer Pilates studio, what else is there for the interiors aficionado who seemingly has everything? The listening room, according to insiders. It's a sexy new space inspired by the Japanese concept of a listening bar — casual venues dedicated to intentional listening on luxe sound systems accompanied by killer cocktails, with many now opened across the UK, from Odioba in Stockport to New Forms in Chelsea.

Then there's the resurgence of analogue tech and hi-fi, a global market that is projected to grow by almost 8 per cent by 2034. And who can ignore the stress-busting benefits of music, when studies regularly sing its praises. With our continued focus on health and wellbeing, it's hardly surprising, then, that our homes are tuning into the hottest interiors trend.

"We're seeing a real shift towards more intentional, slower ways of living at home, and the way people engage with music is a natural part of that," says Andrew Griffiths, founder of the boutique interior design studio A New Day. "For a long time music equipment was something hidden away or apologised for — pushed into a corner or placed in a cupboard with messy wires carefully concealed — but what we're seeing now are clients who want to celebrate it. The listening room offers a dedicated space to do just that, with music as something you sit with rather than something that fades into the background. What's driving this is partly a reaction to how fragmented our attention has become. People are craving rooms with a single, clear purpose."

Of course, the decor has to reflect this vibe. "In a recent project featuring a listening room, we focused on atmosphere first, using an enveloping, tonal palette

with soft textures and a sense of visual quiet,” Griffiths says. “The bespoke joinery and considered layout centre the music system without making it feel overly technical, helping things remain relaxed in feel.”

Other interior designers are catering to increased demand among their audiophile clients as well. “These listening rooms are becoming more frequently requested among those who want screen-free spaces for enjoying the things they love, whether that’s music or something else,” says George Townsin, founder of the interiors practice Studio George. She recently designed one in Hackney for a record collector and music connoisseur. “It was created specifically with this in mind. A deep, comfortable sofa for lounging and listening is positioned directly opposite the speakers, record player and amp with a thick, heavy rug on the floor to create better acoustics. And bespoke joinery was designed and installed in the alcoves either side of the chimney breast to accommodate both 12in and 7in records, with floor-standing speakers spotlighted beneath.”

Elsewhere in London, at a townhouse in Chelsea, Brigitta Spinocchia Freund, creative director and founder of the interior design company Spinocchia Freund, has just completed a cocktail bar-cum-listening room. “The space was conceived as an immersive music lounge with L-Acoustics speakers discreetly concealed so the sound feels rich and layered without interrupting the design of the room,” she says. “Materiality was central to the listening experience, from the fabric-wrapped acoustic wall panels to a soft fitted carpet and the acoustic-panelled ceiling, all working together to create a warm, enveloping sound. Low, comfortable seating and a carefully curated vinyl collection give the room an analogue, salon-like atmosphere that encourages people to sink in, listen and relax.”

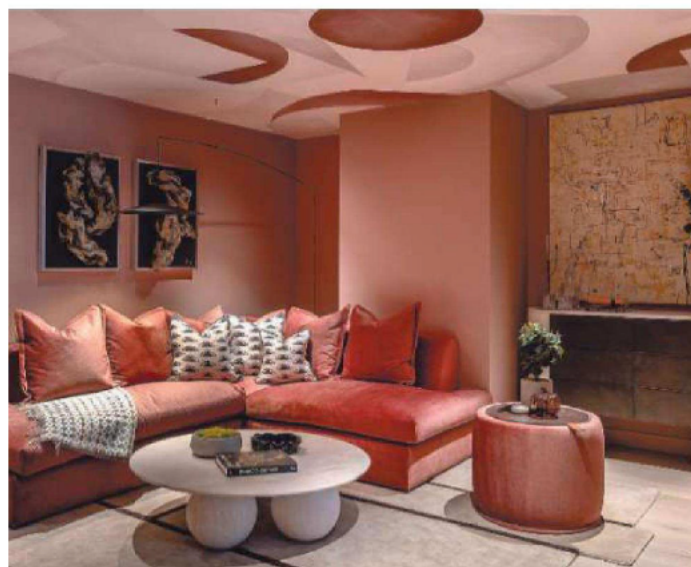


‘The room has an analogue, salon-like atmosphere that encourages people to sink in, listen and relax’

Top, from left The Arla sideboard by Dwell and Wylde chair by DFS. **Below** One of two rooms in a Chelsea duplex dedicated to mindful listening, designed by Angel O’Donnell

Also in Chelsea, Ed O’Donnell — co-founder and creative director of the interiors firm Angel O’Donnell — went one step further by creating not one but two listening rooms in a duplex apartment. “We drenched them in petal-pink warmth, added plump, soft seating and installed acoustic panelling, a keyboard and record player to make them possibly the most inviting spaces in the home,” he says. “Having learnt the folly of doom-scrolling, people are going out of their way to carve out areas that are both analogue and mindful. Rooms dedicated to music — whether making it or simply listening to it — have made a return. And not only music — podcasts, audiobooks or any material that requires a cosy place to sequester oneself, good acoustics and the luxury of time.”

Looking to create your own listening room? First, you need a luxurious chair that doesn’t only look the part but cradles you in all the right places too, such as the Wylde accent chair from DFS, gloriously upholstered in a rock’n’roll leopard print (£519, dfs.co.uk). You’ll want a coffee table with that — for displaying the portable Neutrino table lamp by Studio Brocky, of course (£4,160, studiobrocky.com) — in which case, Dwell’s Eos (£399, dfs.co.uk) is just the thing, with curves in all the right places. Meanwhile, the brand’s Arla sideboard (£699) in an on-trend fluted finish is the perfect spot for showcasing your music kit. Our pick? Something bespoke from Focal, a boutique atelier in Saint-Étienne, France, that enables audiophiles to co-design the perfect music system to pair with their aesthetic via its exclusive Crafts workshop — with hand-crafted products ranging from loudspeakers dressed in feathers to headphones encrusted with diamonds. Otherwise, the Heston 120 soundbar and Bromley 750 speaker from the heritage brand Marshall make all the right noises (£900 each, marshall.com). After something more accessible? The Pro-Ject Colourful Audio System 2 (£1,799, selfridges.com) comprises a turntable, amplifier and speakers that can bring your vinyl and digital music to life with stunning clarity and depth. It’s damn handsome too. ■



The Collector’s House at Chelsea Barracks/Spinocchia Freund/Felix Speller Powerhouse at Chelsea Waterfront/Angel O’Donnell/Taran Wilkhu, Studio George/Richard Chivers