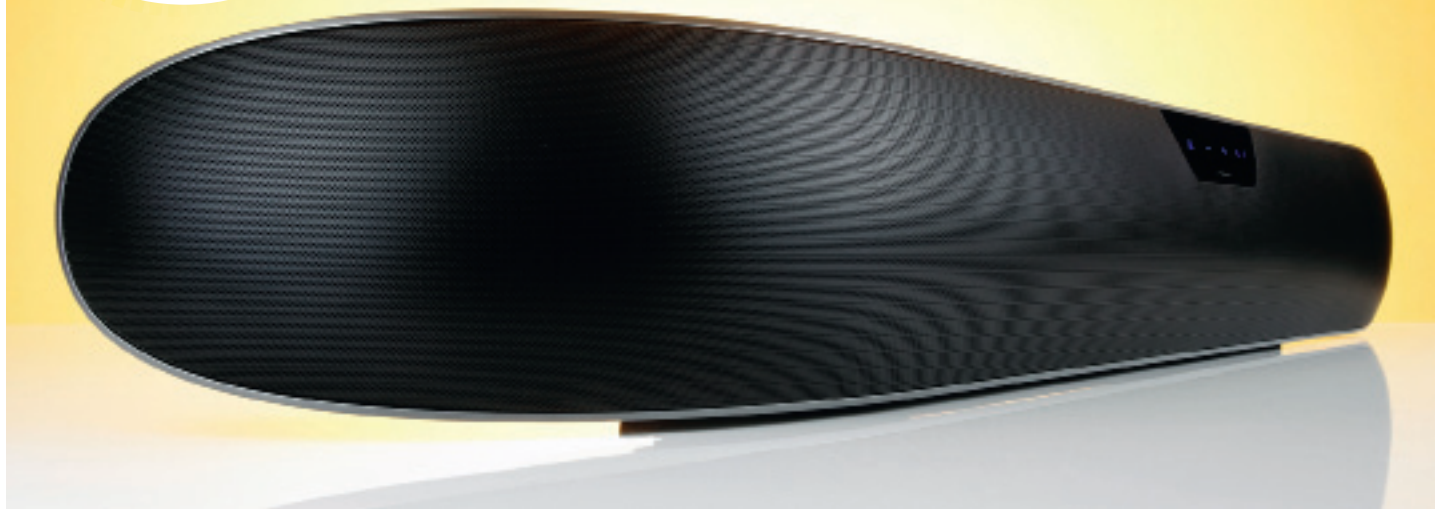


Installation
No mean feet

The B&W comes with two sets of screw-in feet, which allows you to alter the angle of dispersion and to isolate the soundbar from any surfaces. Rest it flat on its base and the unit sounds messy and the unit sounds messy and unappetising.



Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2 £1650 ★★★★★☆

The Panorama 2 marks B&W's second attempt at a premium soundbar solution. We didn't really bond with the original – the level of sound quality and specification (notably the lack of any HDMI inputs) just didn't reach the standards we expect from such a highly respected brand.

Design and build quality for the Panorama 2 are pretty much faultless. Fit and finish are a cut above others in this class, which you'd expect given the expensive price tag, and the mirror-black stainless steel shell wows with sweeping curves and a glossy finish.

Brand-new drivers. Nine of them... Beneath the grille lies an array of nine drivers. They're a similar size to those found in the original, but are in fact all brand-new designs. Five of them (two bass, two midrange and one of B&W's trademark Nautilus tube-loaded tweeters) have been dedicated to the soundbar's centre channel. The remaining four drivers are employed as surround-creating speakers.

On the front of the unit there's also a proximity-sensing control panel and display, which bursts into life when you touch it or waft your hand across the front. On the rear, you'll find B&W has addressed criticism by including three HDMI inputs and one HDMI output among the connections. The small, pebble-like remote is like those supplied

with B&W's wireless speakers and docks, but it's a little fiddly and can be unresponsive at times. The on-screen menus provide tone controls, a viewing distance input and the ability to offset the sound if people aren't sitting together.

Although the Panorama 2 has Dolby Digital and DTS decoding built-in, there's still no provision for Dolby TrueHD or

Play *Total Recall* on Blu-ray and the B&W fires into life, creating a wonderfully detailed, direct sound. The B&W integrates all the elements of the soundtrack into a cohesive unit

DTS-HD Master Audio formats, unlike on the Yamaha YSP-4300 for example, so you'll need to set your Blu-ray player to decode them both.

Play the re-booted *Total Recall* on Blu-ray and the B&W fires into life, creating a wonderfully detailed, direct sound. As the resistance headquarters are breached by Coahaagen and his forces, the B&W integrates all the elements of the soundtrack into a cohesive unit. Gunfire and dialogue are crisp and precise, while high frequencies stay on the right side of sharp. Explosions sound room-tremblingly powerful, but can get a touch tubby, especially at loud volume.

The Panorama 2 uses Dolby Pro-Logic II processing and B&W's own sound algorithm to achieve a virtual surround

effect. Switch it on, and straight away you're aware of greater width to the soundstage, but you sacrifice focus and solidity. We'd recommend listening with the processing turned off.

Switch to plain two-channel playback and the B&W shows it's no sonic slouch. Given a quick blast of the Foo Fighters' *Monkey Wrench*, it does a great job of

organising and defining the frenzied drum play and axe-work. It's a little disappointing though that the B&W lacks any kind of streaming functionality.

The Panorama 2 is an improvement on its predecessor and it outguns its rivals for pure sonic ability. It's not cheap, but the improved level of functionality and focused sound more than compensate.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Design and build quality; HDMI inputs; focused sound; clear dialogue; great integration

AGAINST Expensive; unconvincing surround effect; no streaming capability; fiddly remote

VERDICT Much improved on the original and delivering a quality that justifies the price

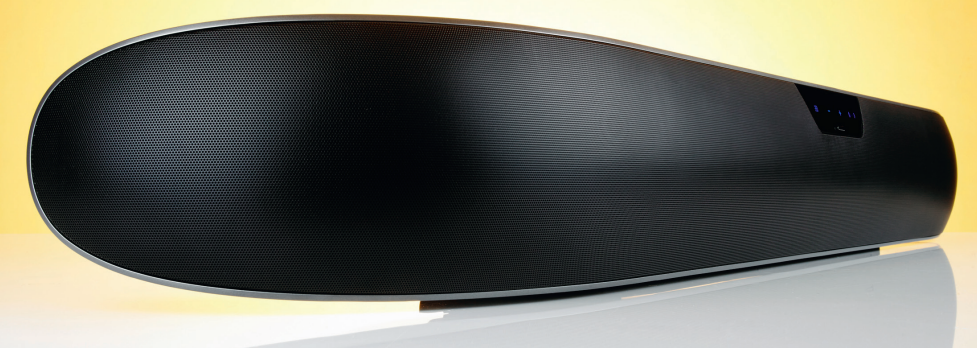
TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2
£1650 ★★★★★☆

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

There's only a whisker between them, but it's the B&W that takes the win, with an appealing blend of form and function



Picking a winner for this test has been anything but straightforward. The lack of a five-star performer, and three four-star systems, just goes to show that, although premium soundbars have strengths, they're by no means perfect.

It also says a lot that the Panorama 2 is the most expensive soundbar here, but we're still handing it the test win. Not only is it an object of beauty, it's the best-sounding and least-compromised solution here. The unit delivers detail, finesse and a directness of sound that entertains whether you're listening to music or movies. There's a good level of connectivity too.

The Sonos combination is a superb option for someone who's looking for good sound performance in a modern package. The Playbar doesn't sound quite as cohesive or engaging as the B&W, and

connectivity is limited, but it's really easy to live with, helped by a great control app and formidable streaming skills.

The Canton isn't what you'd call subtle, in looks or sound, but you can admire the sense of power. We'd sacrifice some of the bravado for a bit more subtlety, but for the money it's a solid buy.

Yamaha serves up a reasonable semblance of surround sound, but there's a general lack of quality to the sound. We're surprised to find a three-star Yamaha soundbar, but its inadequacies become more apparent the more you compare the system with these rivals.

Like the Sonos, the music-streaming aspect of the Libratone Lounge is a feather in its cap, but sound quality lets the side down. Superficially, it's an OK listen, but the longer you spend in its company the more you notice the overbearing bass and disorderly sound.

Facts & figures



Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2
£1650 ★★★★★☆

Inputs 3 x HDMI, optical digital, 3.5mm • **Outputs** HDMI, subwoofer • **Decoding capability** Dolby Digital, DTS • **Wireless streaming** No • **Dimensions (hwd)** 13 x 110 x 18cm • **Weight** 14.1kg



Canton DM 90.2
£1100 ★★★★★☆

Inputs 2 x optical, 2 x coaxial, 2 x analogue • **Outputs** Pre-out, Zone 2, subwoofer • **Decoding capability** Dolby Digital, DTS • **Wireless streaming** No • **Dimensions (hwd)** 15 x 90 x 30cm • **Weight** 17.5kg



Libratone Lounge
£1100 ★★★★★☆

Inputs Optical digital, 3.5mm • **Outputs** None • **Decoding capability** None • **Wireless streaming** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 24 x 100 x 12cm • **Weight** 12kg



Sonos Playbar & Sub (£1200) ★★★★★☆

Inputs Optical digital, Ethernet • **Outputs** Ethernet • **Decoding capability** Dolby Digital • **Wireless streaming** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** Playbar: 9 x 90 x 14cm, Sub: 40 x 16 x 38cm • **Weight** Playbar: 5.4kg, Sub: 16kg



Yamaha YSP-4300
£1300 ★★★★★☆

Inputs 4 x HDMI, 2 x optical, coaxial, analogue • **Outputs** HDMI • **Decoding** Dolby Digital, TrueHD, DTS, DTS-HD Audio • **Wireless streaming** No • **Dimensions (hwd)** 'Bar: 9 x 110 x 16cm, Sub: 45 x 15 x 37cm • **Weight** 'Bar: 6.9kg, Sub: 9kg

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three perfect partners for the Panorama 2



TELEVISION
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B £1500

This 47in TV produces a great image but its sound quality doesn't match. Feed an optical cable from the TV's output into the soundbar and bypass the Panasonic's internal speakers.



DIGITAL TV BOX
Sky+ HD Free with subscription

Take advantage of the B&W's trio of HDMI inputs by hooking up a Sky+ HD box, which has recently upgraded to output Dolby Digital 5.1 over its HDMI output.



MUSIC SERVER
Apple TV £100

To make up for the lack of streaming in the B&W, invest a relatively modest sum in an Apple TV and you can stream music and video into the soundbar via HDMI.

Total build £3250

For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com