> Nothing’s going to touch you in these golden years

Inevitably, as our favourite TV screen size rises beyond the 40in mark, the size of second-room sets is on the up too - so we’ve rounded up seven of the best 32in TVs around (p38) to make your choice as painless as possible. And while you’re kitting out that bedroom or kitchen, check out our round-up of compact radios at every price (p79). But you won’t consign any of the superb new home cinema amps (p54) we’ve tested to a second room - and as for KEF’s astounding new speakers (p19), built to celebrate the company’s golden anniversary, you may just decide to shine a spotlight on them.

Simon Lucas, deputy editor

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KEF LS50 | Stereo speakers | £800

KEF's quality still golden after 50 years

In our experience, Anniversary products tend to be either high-end mega-money statements to show just what the company is capable of, or distinctly retro to show where it started. KEF’s new LS50 is neither.

The marketing blur goes on about connections to the fabled BBC LS3/5a mini monitor (which used KEF drive units), but the fact is that there's little technical substance to link the two. That shouldn't matter - the LS50 remains a blindingly good speaker for the money.

Fine balance and bounce

The drive unit complement is the latest evolution of KEF’s trademark Uni-Q array. The Uni-Q may look like a single unit, but it's really a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter in the centre of a 13cm magnesium/aluminium-coned mid/bass. The idea is to improve the way the speaker disperses sound and help integration.

What looks like a grille in front of the tweeter is in fact a waveguide that improves its high-frequency performance. Even without that opinion-dividing colour - KEF calls it Rose Gold - this is one distinctive driver complement.

The engineers have worked hard on the cabinet. That curved front panel is made of DMC (Dough Moulding Compound: a polyester resin combined with glass fibre and calcium carbonate). DMC was chosen for its mass and inertness.

The rest of the enclosure is made from MDF. It's heavily braced and strongly damped to minimise any resonances.

For boxes that stand just 30cm high, these speakers deliver deep, agile and powerful lows. But everything still sounds balanced.

We don't tend to go on too much about reflex ports. The elliptical one used to tune the bass on the LS50 is unusual, though. Put your fingers inside and you'll feel that it's flexible. This helps to reduce any unwanted midrange distortions.

Given a little space to breathe and mounted on a pair of solid stands (see below) these monitors sound terrific. The first thing that strikes us is the quality of the bass performance. For boxes that stand just 30cm high, these speakers deliver deep, agile and powerful lows from the likes of Massive Attack's Flat of the Blade. But, unlike most small speakers that deliver big bass, the LS50s don't over-egg things - everything sounds balanced.

Move up the frequency range and these KEFs continue to impress. Kate Bush's vocals on 50 Words For Snow are as clear and articulate as you could wish for. These speakers communicate the energy and drive in a piece of music brilliantly.

We're impressed by the speaker's seamless integration too, as we are by the way it sets up a huge stereo image populated by securely focused sounds.

And, perhaps most importantly, these speakers are fun to listen to. It's not something (we think) KEF has always managed with its products. Here it has.

Of course, the LS50s' innate transparency means that any flaws in the partnering kit will be apparent. But get it right and you have what is one of the best standmounters below £1000, and easily one of KEF's most musical efforts in years.

That's the way to celebrate half a century.

**Top Tip**

While the KEF LS50s aren't particularly fussy about positioning - they even sound acceptable close to a wall - they'll perform at their best with ample room to breathe.

**Use it with**

Leonard Cohen Old Ideas

A beautifully recorded album full of subtle layering and nuance. Sounds great with the KEFs.

**System builder**

**CD Player**

Audiolab 8200CD £800

This class-leading CD player is a brilliant buy with stunning sound and digital inputs.

**Amplifier**

Heed Audio Obelisk SI £1290

Don't let the simple style or the relatively low 35W power fool you. The SI is as musical an amp as you can buy for this money.

**Speaker stands**

Custom Design FS104 Signature £200

The KEFs need a good, solid stand, and we've found none better than Custom Design's FS104 Signature at this price.

Also consider

ATC SCM 11 £900

Our 2011 Award-winner may feel the heat from the KEFs, but they remain mighty fine standmounters.

**Rating**

**FOR** Transparency, impressive resolution; excellent bass for size; fine build and finish

**AGAINST** Demanding of partnering equipment

**VERDICT** The LS50s are simply a brilliant achievement and a fine way to celebrate KEF’s 50th anniversary

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