



TANGENT FJORD

not in the least surprised to find said Jensen behind several decades of B&O products, and also the Steinway-Lyngdorf Model D music system, one of the world's most stunning stereo speaker designs.

Equipment

So what's on offer from the Fjord? In terms of conventional hi-fi, this is the most complete system here, thanks to its inclusion of a slot-loading CD player in addition to the top iPod/iPhone dock, and FM radio. (There is also a DAB+ variant of the Fjord available for a small premium, which takes the price to \$1199.) While there are no streaming or internet goodies built in here, the recent upgrade to Apple's iOS allows

streaming from your PC/Mac-based iTunes direct to your iPhone/iPod touch anyway, and that solution works better than most direct streaming models, especially in terms of control.

As noted under the Conran Audio review, good design should be about more than a nice box, and again here the benefits spill into ease of use. The Fjord can be easily wall-mounted, although not too high, since the onboard controls are all touch-sensitive keys located on the top of the unit. And these we absolutely loved — the controls are entirely flush and invisible until back-illuminated. And masterfully, only the controls you need are illuminated at any given time, which proves a huge boon. So

for example, when you're setting an alarm, everything disappears except a Select key and the ones intended for up and down. It saves a lot of time, and is further assisted by the use of words rather than icons, except a few widely-recognised symbols for eject, play, etc.

There is also an auxiliary minijack input at the rear, and a 10-key remote control, which we suspect Mr Jensen delegated to a junior design team, it being less impressive, although an aesthetic match for the main unit.

Performance

Slide a CD smoothly into the Tangent and it instantly impresses with a spacious sound that belies its dimensions. As with the Arcam rCube, stereo imaging is assisted by the speakers firing from the sides of the cube — bass as well as treble in this case, since it uses just a pair of three-inch full-range drivers. This does limit the bass emerging (you won't be shaking up any neighbours), but you can still feel the thud of a bass drum, and from 100Hz upwards this is a high-quality system suitable for any small or medium-sized rooms — home office, bedroom (twin alarms), small lounges. The sonic balance can be adjusted by rather too many EQ options — there's loudness on/off, bass/treble controls, and a set of EQ options, all of which can be piled on top of each other if you're not careful. This was one occasion where we did opt for the 'Pop' EQ option, which seemed best at nudging up the bass without causing deleterious side-effects.

The radio section worked great — a telescopic rod antenna extends from the top, though it can't be rotated to improve reception, nor replaced by an external aerial.

Conclusion

We enjoyed the Fjord greatly. It is perhaps not inexpensive given its conventionality of sources, but it's certainly a high-quality piece of equipment, beautifully designed.



FINAL VERDICT

With such SuperDock joys, which hero would we choose to save us?

The good news is that sonically, there's not a duffer in the contest. We reckon you could take home any of the docks here and you'd get sound either as good as you were expecting, or substantially better.

So how to choose? We can run through the horses-for-courses arguments first.

Want portability coupled with quality? Arcam's rCube stands proud. It's not the lightest portable in the world at 5kg, but it's surely one of the most hi-fi ways on earth to carry your tunes around — though we suspect Arcam intends the rCube's portability to be less 'on-the-shoulder ghetto-blasters-style street use' and more a bonus of easy relocation — out to the patio or off to the holiday home. It's not cheap, and we didn't enjoy the sound quite as much as some others, but as portable hi-fi goes, it cuts a unique path.

The B&O — well, it's crazy, innit. Looks like a bicycle, sounds like rather a bass beast for our tastes. And costs a fair bit, though perhaps less than you'd expect from the company. Still it docks an iPad, which is pretty darned cool, and has undeniable cachet. We reckon you'll already have decided if this is the dock for you.

The Tangent Fjord's relatively simple speaker configuration prevents it entirely reaching the sonic highs of some rivals here. But the sound is still highly enjoyable, the touch-sensitive controls are magnificent, and the design top-notch. Plus it's alone here in having a CD player.

The Conran Audio might seem an oddity to some — we'd encourage you to get up close with it in a showroom somewhere, because it's one of those products that feels better than it photographs. You'll then also be able to hear its ever-enjoyable sonic balance, along with a very useful Bluetooth streaming mode. It's simply well designed.

But we did have a clear favourite here — and not simply because it looks amazing and reeks of build quality. The B&W Zeppelin Air sounds gorgeous, with hi-fi-level qualities that had us playing track after track. You get AirPlay included, with no need to pay an extra fee. We even love its purple LED, and hope it heralds a move away from the 'Tron' electric blue that has been dominating home hi-fi in recent years.

And at the current price of \$799, we reckon it's a winner. Pick the others on their individual merits, by all means, and audition them with your own favourite music if you can. But make sure you include the Zeppelin Air in your deliberations. It's a high flyer. Jez Ford

The name 'Fjord' might suggest Slartibartfast's lovely crenellated edges, but no, this is another minimalist near-cubic design, although slightly higher at 185mm than it is wide or deep (170mm each). And in terms of style, the Tangent Fjord would be our pick of all these fine Superdocks. The silver base accentuates the gloss-black front in an obviously Scandinavian way, thanks to design input from Jacob Jansen, and we were

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Price: \$999 (DAB+ \$1199)

Dimensions (whd): 170 x 170 x 185mm

Weight: 3.5kg

- ⊕ Scandinavian design
- ⊕ CD player as well as dock
- ⊕ DAB+ version available

⊖ Overkill on EQ options

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