



The ZDock

www.zdocks.com — \$98

Until now, there have been no reasonable options in the iPod dock world for those of us who don't choose to go the Wadia route for grabbing the digital bitstream and sending it to the DAC of choice.

If you just want a gorgeous dock to sit on your rack that will take the analog outs (and S-VHS video outputs) from your iPod device, ZDock is the way to roll. For an unbelievably low price of \$98, it's built like a product that should cost four times as much; it has a powder-coated zinc finish and feels substantial as soon as you remove it from the box. It looks like something that you'd expect B&O or Meridan to produce.

The guys at ZDock kept it simple and made a dock for the rest of us. While the full digital setup takes iPod sound to another level, the analog outs are surprisingly good, especially when played through the ZDock. Plus, it uses standard gold-plated RCA output jacks so you can use a regular pair of interconnect cables, which helps tremendously.

It's a perfect match visually for the new silver Cambridge Audio Azur 840 integrated amplifier. I used a pair of AudioQuest Copperhead cables (\$95 for a one-meter pair) to make the connection in my living-room HT system, where the ZDock is a perfect match. We have five iPods and three iPhones in our household, so it's great to have an accessory that allows anyone to plug in an iPod over dinner or drinks.

Because the ZDock does not capture the digital bitstream, it is compatible with

all but the very first iPods that don't have a data cable connector on the bottom, making it that much more user friendly. Those wanting to integrate their iPods into a desktop-computer audio system can easily do so via the USB connection. A tasteful black remote control is included so you can play, pause, fast forward or reverse. The volume-control function has been abandoned on the ZDock in the quest for better sound, so you have to control it from your computer or amplifier.

In a head-to-head comparison, the ZDock definitely is a substantial step up in sound quality from the \$49 Apple dock, which does not include a wall wart or a USB cable, both of which come with the ZDock. This is a well-thought-out product indeed and worthy of one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2010.

