

The speakers making a statement

INTERIORS

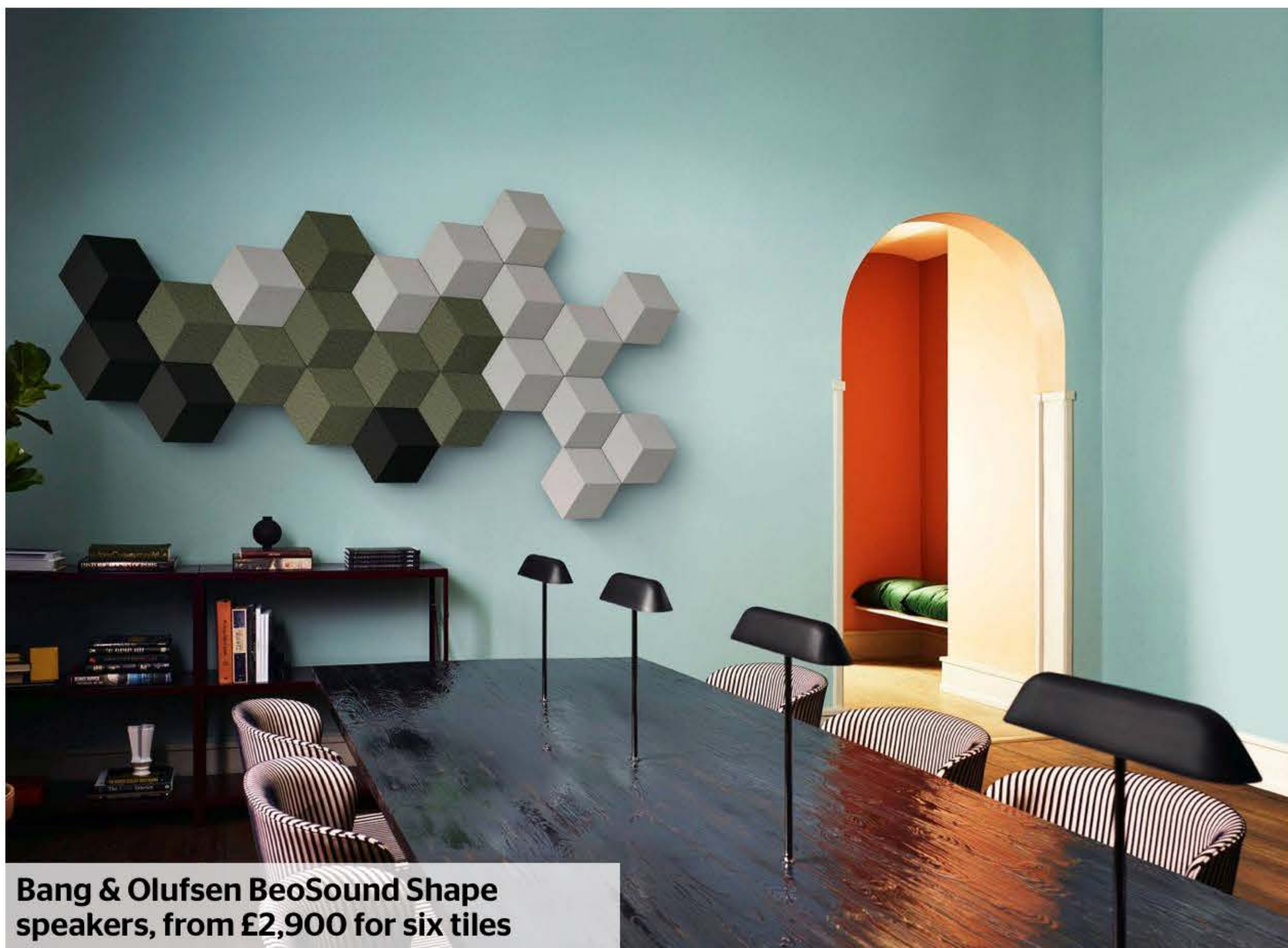
These smart sound systems look too good to be hidden away, says **Carol Lewis**

Luxury home developers often boast about integrated sound systems where you can, at the swipe of an iPad screen, listen to Frank Sinatra in the bath. Now there are reports of people replacing built-in systems with standalone speakers.

A new generation of smart, artistic speakers mean that people don't want them hidden, they want them out — loud and proud. Jonathan Molyneux, the manager at Bang & Olufsen's Marylebone showroom in central London, says he has had clients rip out integrated systems to replace them with more stylish, visible sound systems.

The sculptural BeoSound Shape speakers, amps and dampeners are decorative hexagonal tiles that can be covered in coloured and textured fabrics. You can get them to match your sofa or, as one of Molyneux's clients did, make them look like the Batman insignia.

Jakob Kristoffersen, the design and concept manager at Bang & Olufsen in Denmark, says: "While people might not want speakers to look like traditional speakers, they still want something that expresses



Bang & Olufsen BeoSound Shape speakers, from £2,900 for six tiles

their identity. You want to have a dinner party and put on sounds that mean something to you, and to have a system that expresses who you are, your style and taste in decor."

BeoSound Shape works on an algorithm giving even sounds across the room rather than the traditional sweet spot between two speakers. "People don't sit in a chair and listen to music any more, they tend to be socialising and moving about," Kristoffersen says.

Also popular is the Beoplay A9, a large disc-shaped speaker that can be presented on wooden legs as a piece of furniture or hung on the wall as a piece of art. It can be personalised with a cover displaying your own design or photography — pet pictures are

popular.

The Bang & Olufsen speakers, while lovely, are expensive. The BeoSound Shape system starts at £2,900 for six tiles and the Beoplay A9 system costs from £1,999. However, designer speakers are about to become more mainstream and affordable, with Ikea working on a collaboration with Sonos, which is set to launch in stores next year as part of its Smart Ikea Home range.

The number of smart, voice-activated speakers is growing. After the success of Amazon's Echo speakers, with Alexa voice control, and Google's Assistant, Sonos has launched the Alexa-powered Sonos One system and Apple its Siri-controlled HomeHub.

Katrina Mills, the head buyer



A Steinway & Sons Spirio grand piano

of audio at John Lewis, says: “We’ve had some really exciting developments in the audio market, with voice activation, in particular, making an impact. This year voice-activation speakers have taken a 10 per cent share of the whole audio market. Traditional audio brands such as Sonos, Panasonic and Sony are starting to incorporate voice into their hardware. We are also seeing strong demand for products that have a premium look and feel, and can be incorporated into

Sweet spot

Can music influence how we taste food? Try listening to this track while eating chocolate to see if it enhances the sweet flavour:

<https://soundcloud.com/lyzcooper/awakenings-short-sweetness>

home design,” she says.

“The John Lewis own-brand Cello Hi-Fi, which focuses on using real wood and premium materials sold out in weeks,

showing a clear demand for technology that isn’t just black.”

Nothing says high-brow more than a grand piano and these often feature in large luxury homes, but it will no longer matter that you haven’t progressed beyond playing *Chopsticks* if Steinway & Son’s self-playing, app-controlled Spirio is an option — it costs from £86,665.

It is not only what your sound system looks like, but what you play that matters. White-noise machines are growing in

popularity, fuelled by claims that the sound can help you sleep.

Lyz Cooper, the principal at the British Academy of Sound Therapy, says: “Music can have a direct psychological effect on our minds, bodies and emotions. White ambient natural sounds such as lapping waves, wind rustling through leaves and rain can be conducive to relaxation.”

And the music you play at a dinner party can help to enhance the flavour of food. Cooper says: “High twinkly, sparkly sounds can help to enhance sweet flavours. Rich, warm, exotic music will help to get people in the mood when eating spicy food.” Developers may be missing a trick. Many carefully curate scents to help to sell property, but few consider

the music played while people view. Cooper’s advice: “If you play classical music, people are more likely to offer a higher price for a property because it gives the illusion of a house being grand. You might want a different vibe if you are selling a warehouse conversion in Shoreditch, though. It is all about the image you want to project.” ■