

TAPE OP

The Creative Music Recording Magazine

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w/ Camper Van Beethoven

GEAR REVIEWS

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Primacoustic

London 12 Room Kit

Many of us live in the “real world” — a place where we don’t always have the resources to select, structurally modify, or build a “perfect” production room within the spaces we rent or own. Nine times out of ten, we just have to go with what we’ve got. For some of us, that means a bedroom, an office space, or a garage. Unfortunately, these kinds of smaller spaces suffer acoustically from distracting front-to-back and side-to-side flutter echoes; strong early reflections off of close-in side walls that muddle up and defocus the stereo field; and standing waves that cause destructive cancellations in frequencies related to the room geometry, leading to huge dips in the room’s response.

After having nearly a dozen project studios — ranging from a laundry room to a professionally-tuned mastering suite — I know that a little treatment can go a long, long way. Acoustic treatment can also be a great investment if you can take the stuff with you when you move — which is definitely the case with much of Primacoustic’s line. *London Room Kits* in particular are all-in-one room-taming beasts that include nearly everything you’ll need to implement a basic but effective acoustic treatment of your existing space. The kits provide fabric-covered rigid-fiber panels, mounting hardware, step-by-step instructions, and even a drill bit for the included drywall anchors! Primacoustic offers four kits in the *London* series, with *London 8* being the smallest, for room sizes up to 100 sq ft, and *London 16* the largest, for rooms up to 200 sq ft.

For this review, Primacoustic provided the *London 12* kit, which includes three separate types of absorption panels: twelve 1” thick, 1x1 ft *Scatter Blocks*; eight 2” thick, 1x4 ft *Control Columns*; and two 2” thick, 2x4 ft *Broadband Panels*. The panels are made of micromesh-wrapped rigid fiberglass, covered in black, grey, or beige fabric. This gave me the opportunity to try the equivalent of a *London 8* configuration in my space before a full *London 12* installation in the control room of the broadcast studio inside Yelp’s headquarters. I assessed the acoustic issues of both rooms by listening to familiar source material and running frequency sweeps, both before and after treatment.

My smaller, 100 sq ft room was very boxy sounding, being nearly square in shape. I followed the kit’s guidelines and started by placing the eight *Scatter Blocks* in a 3x5 ft checkerboard pattern behind my monitors to deaden that end of the room. They are very lightweight and can easily be installed with a tacking glue like Liquid Nails, but I chose to use the surface impalers included with the kit. Surface impalers are super-easy to mount onto existing drywall, and they make positioning and repositioning the rigid-fiber panels a simple, nondestructive task.

Next it was time to deal with early side-wall reflections. In a small room, if you put absorbers in *any* position on the walls, you should notice attenuation of flutter echoes as well as some improvement in the stereo image. However, I learned a great trick for determining *optimal* locations for sidewall treatment from mastering engineer, acoustic geek, and all around pal Eric Broyhill. After choosing the best placement and listening position for your monitors, get a friend to slide a mirror down the side of one wall (while you’re in the listening position) until you can see one of your monitors through the mirror; that’s your first treatment location. Slide the mirror some more until you see your second monitor for your second treatment location. I determined placement for four (two on each side) of the *Control Columns* in this manner.

Even with careful measurement and a relaxed pace, it took just over an hour to complete the treatment process by myself. Results yielded a significant and notable improvement in localization, stereo focus, and general clarity. As a bonus, the clean lines and bold quality of the treatment added a professional look to my project space!

The broadcast studio at Yelp’s headquarters in San Francisco posed a different set of problems. The offices are located in the meticulously-restored Pacific Telephone and Telegraph building, originally constructed in 1925. The historical nature of the building dictated restrictions in regards to *any* construction or building improvement/modification. As a result, the control room had to be housed in a standard office space measuring about 150 sq ft. In addition to the usual acoustic limitations found in any small space with opposing parallel walls, there were significant flutter problems towards the back of the room.

Implemented in the same manner as my first installation (with a few changes because we had to cut some of the panels to fit around architectural inconsistencies), the *London 12* kit provided the perfect solution for cleaning up the room acoustically, while avoiding any permanent modifications to the existing structure. Again, the bonus was a clean, professional looking treatment that added a sense of purpose to the control room. Yelp Studio Producer Adam McChane (who happens to be my brother) said, “Because our offices are located in an historic building, any modifications to our room would typically require approval by building management — triggering tons of paperwork and a whole slew of meetings with contractors, licensed installers, and architects to discuss the proposed modifications. Because the included mounting hardware was easy to install and non-invasive, we were able to bypass all the B.S. and get the job done in under 3 hours!” Yelp Editor/Cinematographer Bryan Porter added, “Not only did the treatment neutralize our flutter problem and somewhat ‘deaden’ the room, the panels added a cool studio vibe that reinforces our unique approach to boring corporate video production/editing.”

In the end, the *London 12* kit performed exactly as promised — “a ‘studio in a box’ that includes everything you need to convert a regular room into a functional recording environment.” I love the easy setup as well as the understated, professional look (no gleaming logos). And for those of you who’ve tried foam treatment in the past, you’ll notice the difference in quality immediately, as the rigid-fiber panels included in the *London Room Kits* are much more absorptive than foam, especially at lower frequencies. Cheers to the gang at Primacoustic for providing yet another utilitarian product we can all appreciate and afford!

(*London 12* kit \$769 street; www.primacoustic.com) —SM

