THE RECORDING REVOLUTION

Home Studio Gear Guide

Recommendations to fit any budget!

When it comes to buying gear for your first home studio or upgrading your current setup, the choices can be overwhelming. We live in age when great sounding (and affordable) gear is abundant. And while that's a good thing overall for you and me, the truth is, it can be hard to sift through options and find the right fit.

In this gear guide I want to help point you in the right direction. Having worked in both big pro studios and small home studios for 15+ years I've been around a lot of gear. I've also bought and sold my share of kit over the past two decades to know what I like and trust.

I've made gear recommendations for all the main home studio components, and in different price points. At the end I've even mapped out complete studio bundles that I think would be a great fit for you. These recommendations are the same ones I would give my friends. Just like them, you are one of my friends from afar.

But before we dive in - a few words of preface:

Preface #1 - I don't believe in spending more than you have to.

I also believe that today's "budget" gear sounds and works amazing. Therefore my recommendations don't go beyond $600. If you have the budget and desire to spend more - go for it. I own gear that costs more than $600. Just know that you don't NEED to spend that kind of cash to get a killer sound at home.

Preface #2 - There are other great brands that I don't mention here.

For the sake of your sanity and mine, I have only included a handful of brands in this guide. There are certainly many other great brands who make amazing products at these price points - I just couldn't include them all in this guide.

Preface #3 - I do not make any money from these recommendations.

For the sake of complete transparency, I don't make a single penny from recommending these products or brands. I run The Recording Revolution completely independent of paid sponsorship so that I have the freedom to promote any and all products I actually like and recommend. This gives me peace of mind and gives you the confidence to know that my recommendations are actually my recommendations.

I want you to make great sounding music. I know you need a home studio that works perfectly for your needs, is priced right, and sounds amazing. These suggestions will be just that for you!

Now - let's jump in and find you a great home studio!

Audio Interfaces

The audio interface is the hub of your studio. These boxes contain your microphone preamps, DIs, line inputs, speaker/headphone outputs, and converters. It is the go-between for your instruments and your computer.

Keep in mind that your specific needs (computer connection, number of inputs) will largely determine the type of interface you purchase.

Recommended Audio Interfaces Around $100

PreSonus AudioBox USB 96 - This little box has two microphone inputs, connects via USB to your Mac or PC and is built like a tank. My dad uses one in his home studio for voiceover work!

Focusrite Scarlett Solo - If you only need one microphone input, this box is a great option as it allows you to record at even higher sample rates than most budget interfaces.

Recommended Audio Interfaces Around $250

Apogee One - Probably the smallest interface I've ever used, this little 2-channel USB box gives you great sound, portability, as well as a built in microphone! I actually recorded an entire EP on this thing and it sounded awesome.

Focusrite Scarlett 6i6 - While only having two built in mic pres, at this price point you have a total of 6 available inputs so you can hook up additional preamps to it and record up to 6 tracks at once.

Recommended Audio Interfaces Under $500

PreSonus Studio 6|8 - Perfect for being able to track a full drum kit with four mics, this box gives you lots of inputs for the space.

Focusrite Clarett 2Pre - This little USB interface comes with amazing sounding pres that even have a second circuit built in so you get two pre sounds in one. Plus it has near top of the line converter specs and super low latency recording so you can track through plugins. I have the big brother version of this pre (the 8PreX) and it sounds awesome.

Behringer U-PHORIA UMC1810 - If you can get over the brand snobbery that comes with mentioning the word Behringer in audio circles, this is the best deal on the planet right now. You get 8 mic pres built in + ADAT expansion for up to another 8 pres all for less than $300. And it records up to 96k. And in case you're wondering, yes I've recorded with

Behringer gear. I've done whole records with nothing but Behringer pres - and their gear has only gotten better since.

Microphones

Once you've picked an audio interface, the next most important piece of gear to choose is your microphone(s). Not only are there many great brands and models out there, but there are different microphone types as well: condenser, dynamic, ribbon etc.

Many home studio owners can make an entire record with just one microphone (I've done it numerous times) so start there. Then as you add to your collection, look for different sounding mics to compliment your first purchase.

Something important to note: all microphones sound different. Some are brighter. Some are darker. Some are more sensitive to sound than others. But just about all microphones can give desirable results. All the microphones I've listed below are great all around mics that can take you far, whether you use them for vocals, drums, or acoustic guitars.

In an ideal situation, you will one day have lots of microphones to choose from so you can match the perfect microphone to the voice/instrument in that situation. But in the typical home studio, most of us start out with one mic and use it for everything. **I've built this list of mics to accommodate the one all-around microphone choice.**

That being said, here are my top picks for your "go-to" mic if you can have only one.

Recommended Microphones Under $100

Samson C01 - This little guy sounds amazing on drum overheads and vocals. I know because I've used it on both with great success. One of the best buys out there in my opinion.

Behringer B1 - The first condenser microphone I ever bought! I still own it and use it today. It's bright, clear, and up front - perfect for vocals. It even has a high pass filter and 10db pad.

Audio-Technica AT2020 - A classic in the home studio world. Countless students of mine use this mic day in and day out with great success.

Shure SM57 - This little dynamic microphone is a beast. Great for loud or aggressive vocals, drums, guitar amps, or even the occasional acoustic guitar (I've done it) - it is a staple in home and pro studios alike.

Recommended Microphones Under $250

Blue Microphones Spark - One of the coolest looking mics I own, it sounds as good as it looks. I tracked all my lead vocals for an EP with this and they sounded focused, up front, and amazing. It has an interesting “Focus” button on it that changes the EQ curve of the mic for a different sound.

Rode NT1-A (or NT1) - I own three of these mics. They are one of my all time favorite mics for quality, dependability, and low noise. Nothing fancy - just great sound from a great company.

Recommended Microphones Under $500

AKG C214 - Using the same capsule as its bigger brother the classic 414, this is a great all around microphone. I’ve used 414s for vocals and drum overheads with great success so the 214 would work just as well.

Rode NT2-A - With that same amazing Rode sound and build quality as the NT1-A, the NT2-A adds multiple polar patterns, a high pass filter, and a pad. This gives you a lot of flexibility in the studio.

Shure SM7B - So many rock singers have used this dynamic mic in both stage and studio applications. It has a way of focusing the sound of aggressive vocals while also sounding amazing on melodic singing.

Studio Monitors (Speakers)

You'll need some way to hear your music as you record and mix it. Studio speakers (which are called monitors) allow you to "monitor" or listen to your audio critically. They are much higher quality than your built in computer speakers and the great news is you don't have to spend a lot to get a clear picture of what your music really sounds like.

Keep in mind that the positioning of your speakers and the way your room sounds will have a greater effect on your audio than the actual monitors itself. Also, if you want to skip the speakers route entirely and go with headphones, I have give you my recommendation below as well!

Recommended Monitors Under $300 (pair)

KRK Rokit 5 - One of my favorite pairs of monitors, the Rokit 5s are a great home studio choice. I currently mix on the Rokit 6s. While no 5 inch speaker will give you a ton of low end, you can get a great mix with these bad boys. Just ask my buddy and Grammy winner Jacquire King. He does :-)

PreSonus Eris E5 - I've mixed quit a few projects on PreSonus Eris speakers and they sound great. Silky smooth and clear. Exactly what you need a studio monitor to be.

Behringer Truth B1030A - Another pair of great speakers that I've mixed some projects on - these versions of the Behringer Truth line of speakers are FAR better than their older stuff. Very easy to mix on.

Recommended Monitors Under $600 (pair)

Yamaha HS7 - When I think of studio monitors, Yamaha always comes to mind. Mostly because every studio I've ever been in has a pair of NS-10s. These HS7s are a home studio version and are quite popular among my students.

Focal Alpha 50 - Focal makes amazing speakers, and to get a pair at this price is stunning. My buddy and producer Fab Dupont swears by Focal, and tells me how amazing they are every time I see him.

KRK Rokit 8 - If you have a bigger room (like a basement studio, or larger garage space) and want to step up to an 8 inch speaker then I'd recommend the KRK Rokit 8s. Lots of speaker for the price and you'll get more accuracy in the low end than a 5 or 6 inch monitor.

BONUS - Recommended Headphones

I personally don’t recommend investing in any headphones under $100 if you will be doing the majority of your mixing work on them. That being said, you don’t need to spend much to get quality. Here is my top choice:

KRK KNS8400 - My absolute favorite headphones, I use these for tracking and mixing day in and day out. They are clear, powerful, and balanced - and under $150.

Recording + Mixing Software (DAW)

So now we get to an interesting section - your DAW, which stands for Digital Audio Workstation. This is your main recording and mixing software. This is a super important part of your studio because it's what you'll be staring at and playing with for hours on end. It's also what allows you to take your captured audio and make it sound amazing.

But do you wanna know a little secret?

It doesn't matter in the least which piece of software you use. At least not as it relates to sound quality. Your sound is determined by your audio equipment (microphones, audio interface) not by the software. Once your analog audio is converted into digital 1s and 0s any software will do a great job.

I have friends in the industry who use almost every platform out there in a professional setting, so all of the options below are legitimate choices for your studio. That being said, here are some recommendations that will help you find the right software for YOU!

Recommended DAW For Mac Users

GarageBand (Free) - If you own a Mac, then you already have a power packed piece of recording and mixing software called GarageBand. It comes loaded with loops, virtual instruments, and the ability to record, mix, and release your music with ease. I've made an entire song with it and so can you!

Logic Pro X ($199) - Want a bit more functionality and control than GarageBand? Then step it up to its bigger brother Logic Pro X. A great platform for composing, recording, and mixing, Logic is one of the best deals around. It even comes loaded with virtual guitar amps, pedals, and a powerful virtual drummer!

Recommended DAW For Mac + PC Users

Studio One Professional ($399) - From PreSonus, the makers of some great audio interfaces and preamps, Studio One is becoming a legitimate contender for the home studio. One of my favorite features of this DAW is the built in mastering suite. Very slick. If you're not ready for the whole deal, you can get **Studio One Artist** for only $99.

Avid Pro Tools ($599 or $299 if you're a student. They also offer monthly payment plans) - Touted as the "industry standard" Pro Tools is used in recording studios all over the globe. This is mainly because it was one of the original DAWs to hit the market and it's just a solid platform for both recording and mixing. I've personally used Pro Tools for 15 years now and it's still my favorite platform for my studio. If you're interested in trying Pro Tools before you jump they even have a free version called Pro Tools First.

Turn-Key Startup Home Studios

Now if you don't like to pick and choose what you need for your studio, allow me to recommend some complete home studio setups that would pair nicely in different budgets. These setups will get you up and running right away and still leave room for some expansion (via more mics, upgraded software, etc) in the future.

Basically if I were to start over today owning nothing, here is what I would buy depending on my budget.

Complete Home Studio For Under $200

This home studio setup would be perfect for the singer/songwriter who is looking to get started as soon as possible with a minimal budget.

- **Behringer U-Phoria UMC22 Interface** ($69) - Comes with Tracktion software, so no need to buy an additional DAW to get started.
- **Behringer C-1 Microphone** ($58)
- **Behringer HPS3000 Headphones** ($19)
- **AmazonBasics XLR Cable** ($8)
- **AmazonBasics Mic Stand** ($25)
- **Aokeo Pop Filter** ($10)

Complete Home Studio For Under $350

This home studio setup would be perfect for the singer/songwriter who can play everything herself. For the mic cable, stand, and pop filter feel free to go with any brand you like.

- **Focusrite Scarlett Solo Interface** ($109) - Comes with Pro Tools First and Ableton Live Lite software, so no need to buy an additional DAW to get started.
- **Samson C01 Microphone** ($79)
- **KRK KNS 6400 Headphones** ($99)
- **Pro Co XLR Cable** ($15)
- **On Stage Mic Stand** ($29)
- **Gator Pop Filter** ($21)

Complete Home Studio For Under $850

This home studio setup would be perfect for the band or artist that wants to record more than two inputs at a time and still have some room for expansion up to 4 inputs. You also get two very different sounding and versatile microphones. For the mic cable, stand, and pop filter feel free to go with any brand you like.

- **PreSonus Studio 6|8 Interface** ($319) - Comes with Studio One Artist software, so no need to buy an additional DAW to get started.
- **Blue Spark Microphone** ($199)
- **Shure SM57 Microphone** ($99)
- **KRK KNS 8400 Headphones** ($149)
- **Pro Co XLR Cable** ($15)
- **On Stage Mic Stand** ($29)
- **Gator Pop Filter** ($21)

Complete Home Studio For Under $1600

This home studio setup would be perfect for the band or studio wanting the flexibility to record 8 channels of drum mics or a full band live. You also get three very different sounding and versatile microphones plus we're adding a pair of monitor speakers. For the mic cable, stand, and pop filter feel free to go with any brand you like.

- **Focusrite Scarlett 18i20** ($499) - Comes with Pro Tools First and Ableton Live Lite software, so no need to buy an additional DAW to get started.
- **Rode NT1-A Microphone** ($229)
- **Blue Spark Microphone** ($199)
- **Shure SM57 Microphone** ($99)
- **KRK KNS 6400 Headphones** ($99)
- **KRK Rokit 5 Studio Monitors**($358)
- **Pro Co XLR Cable** ($15)
- **On Stage Mic Stand** ($29)
- **Gator Pop Filter** ($21)

Final Thoughts…

Whew - that was a lot of stuff! Hopefully you have found this gear guide to be helpful and not overwhelming. That, at least, has been my goal.

The thing to remember about home studio gear these days is this: you can do great, professional work on just about any of it. What interface, microphone, DAW, or speakers you use really won't make that much of a difference. You know what will?

You!

Your level of talent, skill, and hard work are what will make the biggest difference. Always remember that we (the songwriters, musicians, and engineers) are always the bottleneck to better recordings. Not our gear.

When you come to accept that truth, you have a lot more freedom when it comes to gear shopping. Simply start with your budget - what you can afford - and go from there. Don't feel bad if you can't get the more expensive options I've listed. Or ones that I didn't even list. Just grab what you can and learn to use it well.

My home studio has changed a lot over the years. Partly out of curiosity and partly because my needs have changed. When I started out I was only doing singer/songwriter stuff for my own music so all I needed was a small 2 channel USB interface, some headphones, and one mic.

These days I track full bands with 12+ inputs at a time and mix for clients all over the world so I have a bigger interface, more preamps and microphones, and even a couple sets of speakers in addition to my headphones. I've also since added things like MIDI keyboards, control surfaces, and acoustic treatment.

But at its core, my studio is the same as all the ones listed above. Microphone + audio interface + DAW + speakers/headphones. The rest is in between your ears :-)

If this guide has been helpful to you, let me know by emailing me here: graham@therecordingrevolution.com

A special gift for you

Also - my friend and personal Sales Engineer at Sweetwater has extended an exclusive offer to help make sure that all of your vocal tracks are "keepers" by **offering you a free pop-filter.**

Simply place your order online with Sweetwater for one or more of the products listed in this guide and put this in the Customer Comments section:

"Alan Carter, Graham sent me for my free pop-filter".

Or, if you'd prefer to order over the phone you can reach him directly at 800-222-4700 ext 1354. And if email is your thing then click **here**!

I wish you all the best success as you set up or grow your home studio and make the best music of your life!

Here's to making better music now!

Graham Cochrane
RecordingRevolution.com

P.S - Looking for product reviews I've done? **Check them all out here.**