

Apple HomePod Mini: 10 Super-Cool Things Not Revealed In The Keynote

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Apple HomePod mini in white. APPLE

Yesterday's Apple Event began with the unveiling of the company's new miniature smart speaker, the HomePod mini. We learnt a lot about it, from its killer price (\$99) to the ways it's smarter than the original HomePod. But there was plenty more that wasn't revealed.

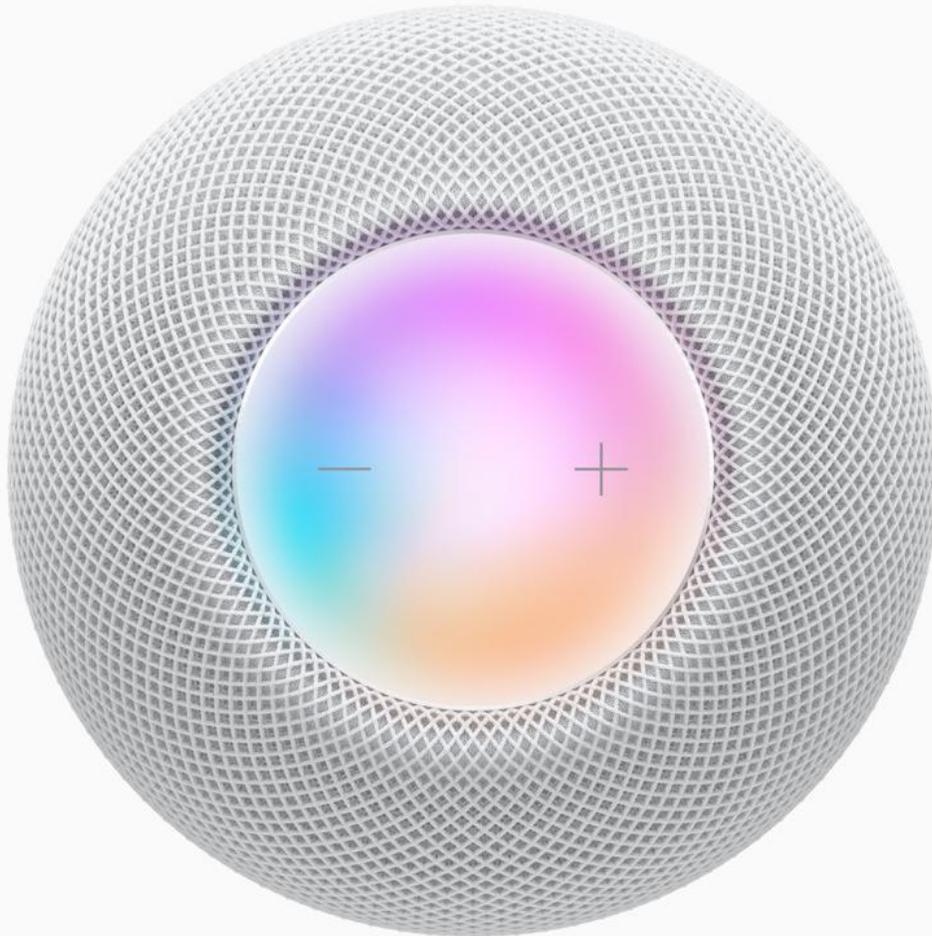
Since the keynote, I've been talking in depth to Apple about its new little wonder. Here's what wasn't revealed then, but you should know about...

1. Can you pair HomePod mini with HomePod?

No. Although you can pair two HomePods or pair two HomePod mini speakers, I asked Apple if you could make a connection between the old and new models. The imbalance between the speakers makes such pairing unfeasible. However, for whole-home audio, or multi-room sound as it's called, then the speakers work seamlessly together.

2. It packs suspension

The output of the HomePod mini is so powerful, according to Apple, that it needs something to isolate any vibrations, so the speaker has a suspension system built in to overcome this.



The edge-to-edge display atop the HomePod mini. APPLE

3. The display goes edge to edge

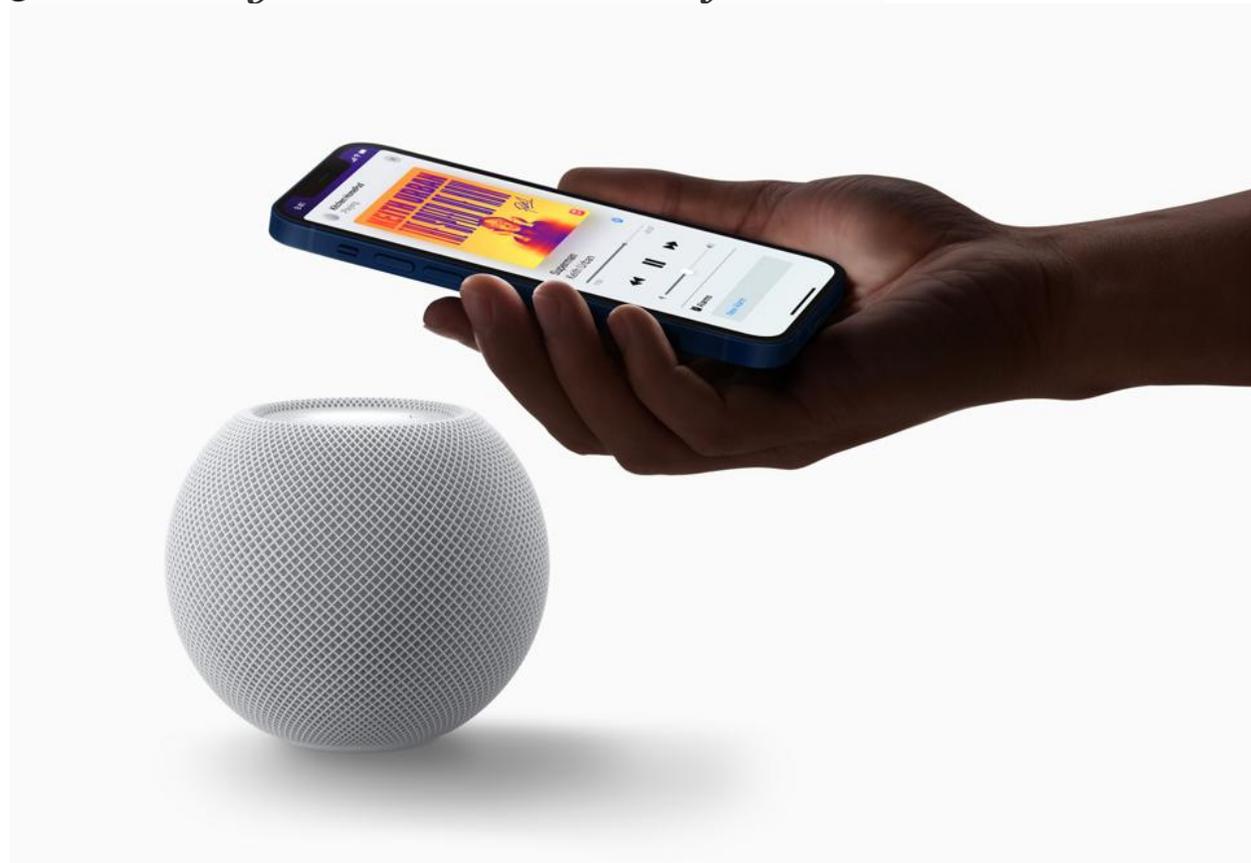
If you take a look at the display on the top of the original HomePod, you'll see it's circular and attractive but it has a dark area around the lit part (though the screen and surround are impeccably matched so you can't see the join).

On the HomePod mini, the display itself is smaller but it is now edge-to-edge illuminated which, judging by the keynote, looks pretty cool.

4. The magic number is 180

For computational audio, that is. It's the number of calculations the HomePod mini makes every second. Computational audio is the ability of the speaker to combine the S5 chip, software and hardware to optimize the output. It aims to understand the music coming into the HomePod mini and dynamically adjust it to squeeze every drop of goodness out of it.

5. Proximity controls have extra features



HomePod mini knows when your iPhone is near. APPLE

The keynote demo showed what Apple is informally calling prox controls: you bring your iPhone close to the HomePod mini and the handoff experience transfers music out of the phone and into the mini. That works both directions, but what wasn't shown is you can also have nothing playing on your iPhone and when you bring it close you'll get suggestions of what you might want to be listening to.

Similarly, if something is playing, a track chosen by another family member, you can see what's playing just by bringing your iPhone close. And you can take control of the playback, too.

6. You can customize the alarm sounds on the HomePod mini (and HomePod)

“Hey, Siri, set a timer for 9 minutes.” It's not an uncommon command. But supposing you want something a bit more personalized? It looks like you will be able to choose a track from Apple Music as your alarm or timer sound, which is handy.

But, and I can't emphasize this strongly enough, make sure everyone knows what's going on. I once had an issue when a family member didn't know that the timer noise indicated that the brownie needed to come out of the oven. Only 20 minutes later was the mistake (which suddenly became my responsibility) realized. You'll be glad to know that much of the brownie was salvageable.



If you could see inside a HomePod mini, this is what you'd see. APPLE

7. Intercom works with everything

With the HomePod mini you can make an announcement to a specific room or to your whole home. This works with HomePod mini and the original HomePod, too. But it also includes your personal devices, too. Apple felt that having the announcement blurt out on your iPhone, iPad or Apple Watch may not be appropriate so instead it will deliver a

notification to your device and you can choose to play it on your device.

8. And the notifications are passing

After all, if your announcement is, “Dinner’s ready” then that has a limited lifespan of usefulness. So the notifications only last for a short duration and then they vanish. You don’t get a stack of them building up.

9. Why did Apple choose the S5 chip?

That’s the one that powers the Apple Watch Series 5, unlike the original HomePod which uses the A8 chip first seen in the iPhone 6 back in 2014. The S5 was first seen in 2019. Apple chose the S5 because it has tremendous processing power but it also is energy efficient and low power. Plus, it’s tiny, well, it fits in a watch, and Apple wanted to devote as much of the volume as possible to the acoustic system and not to thermal management and things like that.

10. Thread technology

HomePod mini’s smart-home capabilities were talked about but what wasn’t mentioned is that it supports Thread technology, which aims to connect all your devices together in one big mesh. It’s part of the standard for smart homes that Apple, along with Google, Amazon and other industry leaders are putting together. It may not do that much yet, but having compatibility is useful future-proofing.



Apple HomePod mini and the Apple devices it interacts with. APPLE

Oh, and one more for luck: HomePod is getting a cool upgrade

HomePod, the original, is getting a special feature of its own: Pair a HomePod or a pair of HomePods with an Apple TV and you'll be able to get 5.1, 7.1 and even Dolby Atmos surround sound using its beam-forming speaker array.

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