

- **Apple Spent 4 Years Perfecting Its Most Surprising Product Yet and It Was Worth the Wait**
- The AirPods Max are surprisingly good, and reflect everything Apple has learned about what people want in headphones.

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Apple introduced a lot of products this year. Some of them we knew about in advance. We knew, for example, that Apple would launch new Macs this fall with the M1 processor. Apple told us they would. We also knew the iPhone 12 was coming--the company introduces new models of its flagship device every fall.

On the other hand, some products aren't as obvious--but aren't necessarily a surprise. The 13-inch MacBook Pro the company introduced earlier this year made sense considering the larger model had already been updated a few months prior.

Some of them, however, came as a surprise.

The AirPods Max, for example, were a surprise for several reasons. It wasn't that we hadn't heard that Apple might introduce a new pair of over-the-ear headphones. That had been rumored for a while. By December, though, it seemed likely that Apple was planning to wait until 2021 to introduce them, if ever.



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So, when the company did introduce them on December 8, it was a surprise. Even the name came as a surprise. The consensus seemed to be that if Apple ever did introduce a pair of over-the-ear headphones, they'd be called AirPods Studio. People also predicted they would have a large touch surface on the side of the ear cups. Surprise, they don't.

The most surprising thing of all, though, might just be how long Apple spent working on the AirPods Max. According to a former Apple engineer, who revealed on Twitter that he had signed a non-disclosure agreement that covered the AirPods Max, it started over four years ago.

Apple isn't a company to rush anything. It's never in a hurry to be first. Instead, it's willing to take its time to make something that conforms to its opinion of what the product should be. What's most interesting about the revelation that Apple spent so long is that four years ago is exactly when Apple introduced the original AirPods. This means they started working on the Max version almost immediately after the iconic white earbuds first started appearing in ears everywhere.

The AirPods Max are--interesting. They're also very expensive, and that's an important place to start, since paying \$550 for a pair of headphones means they better be good in all sorts of ways. The AirPods Max are surprisingly good.

I mean that in the sense that they sound, well, good. I also mean it in the sense that as far as the things you expect a pair of AirPods to do, the AirPods Max

do all of them very well. The noise cancellation is as good as any pair of headphones I've used. Then there's spatial audio, which is hard to ready do justice until you try it.

The idea is that it creates a soundstage that makes you feel like you're in the room with a full set of surround speakers, placing you in the middle of the action in a movie, for example. I don't know how to explain how surprisingly incredible it is, other than to say that it's the audio equivalent of what retina displays were to your eyes.

The lack of touch controls might be a surprise to some, but the Digital Crown--which is borrowed from the Apple Watch (at least in spirit, the one on the AirPods Max is bigger)--is a far better option for volume and play controls.



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They also share the same ability to seamlessly connect to your Apple devices in a way that makes you wonder why no other manufacturer has figured out how a way to connect that doesn't require an endless dance of pairing and unpairing and reconnecting every time you switch from a Zoom

meeting on your laptop to listening to a podcast on your iPhone.

Everything about them is very good. Well, except the case.

We'll ignore the fact that Apple spent four years working on something and apparently forgot to include a case, requiring someone to cut one out of chamois at the last minute. It's surprisingly un-Apple. I'd have a hard time recommending the AirPods Max to most people, simply because \$550 for a pair of headphones is quite the high bar. I think that overall they meet that bar, but only if you need something more than a pair of AirPods Pro.

And, they are more. Apple managed that with the AirPods Max in more ways than one. Of course, I wouldn't expect anything less from a company that prides itself on exceeding expectations. In that sense, I guess the AirPods Max aren't a surprise at all.

original article:

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