Smoking Apples

The Magazine

Smoking Apples.

The best of reviews. The most unique tips. And comprehensive news updates on everything and anything Apple.

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Who's behind this shindig?

Aayush Arya, (Ex) Editor-in-Chief

A 19-year-old student from Siliguri, West Bengal, Aayush Arya has been a Mac fanatic (fanboy, zealot, apologist, whatever) for a few years now. He owns a 17-inch MacBook Pro, 16GB iPhone, and various other products bearing the Apple logo.

Apart from ensuring that we put on a polished appearance here at Smoking Apples and hosting the podcast, he's a freelance author for Macworld magazine and for sister site MacUser and also an irregular contributor for Apple Matters. He's also a complete grammar nazi, a trait he's quite proud of, but one that is a constant source of frustration for everyone else on the team. And he puts a double 'a' in his name just to be at the top of lists like this one. You might want to check out his useless little webpage and Twitter feed if you're impressed by his various achievements in life.

Aayush has now moved on to a different path. It was a joy while we had him here.

Ashwin Ravindran, Author

Ashwin wants to do many things in his life, a sampling of which are joining the Indian Army, bungee jumping over the Niagara falls, being an entrepreneur, traveling around the world, being the mayor of Chennai, and a couple of other things that'll give you the goosebumps. Maybe that's why he's not doing anything worthwhile

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The linked list brings you interesting news stories, articles, and opinions on anything and everything Apple. For a more comprehensive and up to date linked list, news updates, and little tips, follow us on twitter (twitter.com/smokingapples)

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http://daringfireball.net/reviews/iphone3g.html

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Review

Pixelmator: An early look at the 1.3 Beta "Tempo"

While Adobe has just made their big announcement for the CS4 package, the Pixelmator Team has been working on a new beta of their Photoshop alternative, Pixelmator 1.3 "Tempo". Yes, they have a habit of christening their releases with code names. Gives it a little more appeal, don't you think?

Now, I'm not sure whether it is the placebo effect but the guys have really got the tempo going with this release. No, it's not an official release yet. Even a public beta hasn't been made available yet, so there's no point looking around for it. The good folks at Pixelmator let us in on their little secret in advance so that we can share a quick review with you, our dear readers.

While definitely not a Photoshop competitor in the absolute sense—the comparison to Photoshop being unavoidable—Pixelmator is definitely a very capable image editor, with a full set of tools and controls that should please even some of the more advanced users. Moreover, Pixelmator has incorporated some very innovative fea-

tures, some of which Adobe themselves could take a hint or two from. I come from a Photoshop background and had used Pixelmator very sparingly so far. Therefore, it's as new to me as it might be for some of you. Let's take it for a spin now, shall we?

On first look, Pixelmator looks like a sexed up Photoshop. There are dark palettes with light accents borrowed from the default Leopard HUD (or did they have this before Leopard?); the toolbar icons are just gorgeous with the popping animations and all; and the contrast provided by the dark interface makes a colourful canvas just pop. The palettes, however, are of the old school floating variety, which I think should've been done away with. An interface like Iris would have been a better implementation, but the current one is not bad in any way.

One of the best Photoshop-trumping features of Pixelmator is that it is a Cocoa application. This means that you have access to the iLife media browser (limited to Photos), the systemwide Color Picker and the Fonts panel. Being
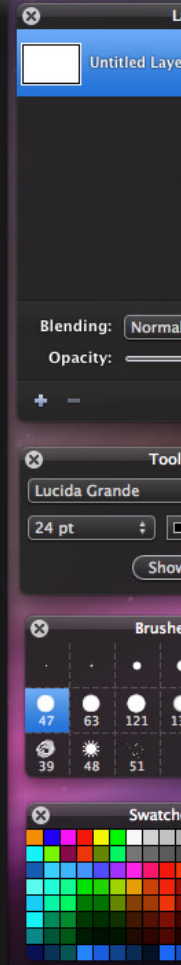
a Cocoa application also enables Pixelmator to access a whole bunch of quartz composer effects, which I will go over shortly.

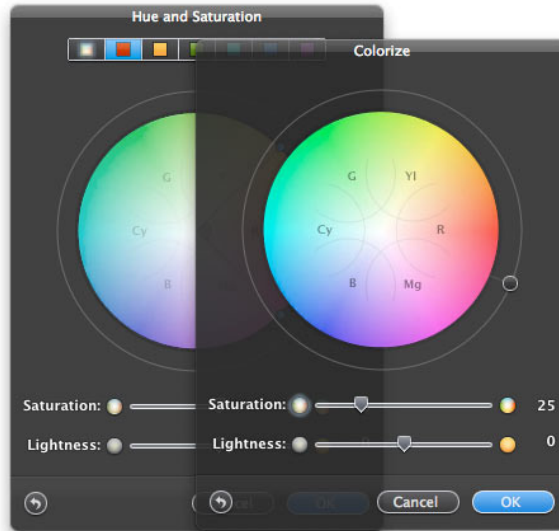This latest version of Pixelmator is souped up with little UI enhancements that give you the reassuring feeling that you are working on a Mac application. For instance, if I have the move tool selected, the layer is automatically ready for Free Transform (with which I reduced the size). This totally cuts down on a whole step of hitting the Free Transform shortcut. Also, whenever you invoke any dialog box or palette, the floating palettes fade away so that you can concentrate on your artwork.
These are the kind of UI enhancements we look for in Mac OS X, but can never be found in something as Windowsy as Photoshop.

Adjusting Colour

Pixelmator's Hue/Saturation dialog box brings up the most innovative colour wheel I have ever come across. Though seemingly complex, it's actually based on a very simple concept. Anyone with a colour background will be able to grasp it instantly. There are six designated areas for Red, Green,

and Blue, as well as Cyan, Magenta, and Yellow. Yes, they have combined the two colour modes in a single dialog box. You don't even need to understand colour to be able to use the wheel. Just spin it and watch your document change! It kinda has that make me rich feeling of being in colourful Las Vegas. Directly below it lie controls for brightness and saturation. Switching between tabs at the top allows you to edit only a certain colour, which actually helps you learn how colours work in a graphic.

The range of tools is very adequate. From simple ones like Hue/Saturation and Colour Balance to the more advanced tools like Curves and Levels, they should be enough to satisfy any colour adjustment need that you may have.

Unfortunately, all of the adjustments you make, including Brightness/Contrast, Levels, and Color Balance, are permanent. You can Command+Z
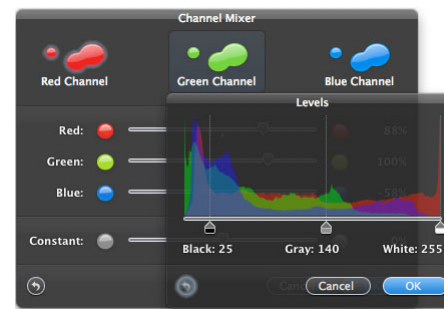
your way back to the previous state but you cannot fine tune your adjustment once it is made. Non-destructive editing is actually a feature of Cocoa and should have been implemented.

Selection tools

Pixelmator comes with all of the common selection options like the Lasso, Rectangle, and Magic Wand tools. Much like the Instant Alpha feature in iWork or Quick Selection in Photoshop, the Magic Wand tool will grab similar colours based on the how far you drag the mouse. You can make it select contiguous or non-contigous or even use modifier keys like Option-Drag to minus the selection. The tool uses Pixelmator's own algorithm and, by the looks of it, it works pretty well. I was able to separate colours in a fairly complex painting and removing the sky from an image was a piece of cake. The Magic Wand tool carries over into the Paint Bucket tool as well, so you can instantly fill out a certain piece without worrying about having to select it first. Check out the before and after shots of using the Magic Wand tool below.

I was, however, disappointed to find that Pixelmator lacks the Pen tool, as well as any support for paths or shape layers. This will come as a big downer for many professionals. But since the

The brown area on top is actually a blue sky. Merely dragging out a circle makes a selection

average user doesn't know squat about paths, the lack of this feature may not be quite so big a deal, depending on your proficiency with Photoshop.

From the Toolbox

Pixelmator includes the popular Rubber Stamp tool, as well as Blur and Sharpen. Absence of the Dodge and Burn tools will not be well received by graphics professionals. There are also buttons for Quick Mask and Standard mode, which often come in handy. For more complex masks and saving selections, a special Masks palette can be accessed from the toolbar.

In my pre-beta, the Text tool refused to work but I'm pretty sure it will in the final version. The OS X Fonts panel controls all of the text attributes, which should be a welcome change for many Mac users. This gives you standardised font control as well as access to all your font categories.

Layer management

With any serious image editing software comes the layers functionality. And while Pixelmator doesn't offer a full array of features, it gives an adequate set of tools for layering up your editing process. First and foremost, the user interface touches to the layers palette are really good. Simple checkboxes to turn layers on/off and double click to rename. Even the previews of the image look great against the dark background. Standard features of locking or linking layers and opacity control are available, along with a full set of blending options.

It is sad, however, that there are no layer styles whatsoever. I, for one, am not sure how one creates a drop shadow without a layer style, specially someone like me, who's been spoilt with all the object styles in Photoshop. You can, however, create masks, clipping masks, and create and edit transparent layers. One innovative feature is "New layer via iSight", which instantly grabs a frame from your iSight camera and allows you to use it in your document.

Effects and Filters

This is where Pixelmator really shines. It uses Mac OS X's OpenGL engine and features startling effects that are easy to create—a little too easy, perhaps. Standard filters like blur, sharpen, distortion effects, stylize, etc. are all there and work just

fine. There are also some advanced effects like Pagecurl, which would take you plenty of time and expertise to create in Photoshop.

The UI of the controllers for each filter is really well designed. If your effect needs to begin from any particular spot on your document, the dialog box will come attached with an animated string. You can move the reference point on your document with which the string will animate further. This is a fairly useless but super cool feature nevertheless. And don't tell me you don't long for super cool effects. We all know how much time you spend going back and forth in the Time Machine browser for no reason whatsoever. The effects are also rendered live as you drag the sliders across, instead of waiting for you to leave the scrubber. So, in effect, you can animate that entire page curl I mentioned above.

The Filters menu also includes Quartz Composer effects, which are rendered live by your graphics card. So all the desktop effects you might have seen throughout the Mac OS X experience (the ones in Photo Booth, for instance) are fully operational in Pixelmator as well.

Performance

Pixelmator starts up really quick, which is handy when you want to do some quick editing. The program's performance, however, suffers when it comes to large images. Applying the magic wand

on a 6 megapixel JPEG (with a bunch of other apps and documents open) kind of put a strain on the system. It is not unbearable and, of course, will vary from system to system, but don't expect super fast performance on heavy images.

This is partly due to the way Pixelmator renders images. Photoshop will not show you a good onscreen image, which many a times includes jagged edges and pixelation. It also waits for you to release any scrubber before rendering that effect. Pixelmator, on the other hand, renders everything live, which must be adding a toll on the resources.

However, users of previous versions of Pixelmator will be happy with this upcoming release. I tested this version against the 1.2 version and I'm certainly seeing a lot of performance improvements.

Help and support

The Help menu is very neatly organised and features a full list of keyboard shortcuts. The shortcuts are very similar to the ones used by Photoshop so you won't get confused. Of course, you can customise any of the menu bar shortcuts by means of the OS X Keyboard Shortcuts preference pane.

If you can't find what you need in the Help section, Pixelmator forums are an excellent resource and that's where you should head to. The developers themselves participate in the forum and are very helpful. You will also find a lot of tutorials to achieve different effects on their blog.

Miscellaneous notables

Pixelmator supports Automator actions. I didn't quite understand how this feature works, but from what I can tell, it allows batch processing, resizing, or adding quick filters to a bunch of images.

Photoshop support, along with a lot of different file formats, is included by default. So if you have a PSD, even with layers, Pixelmator will read it as you'd expect it to. I couldn't get any PSDs to open up though, probably due to the software being in pre-beta stage, so I can't tell how well it handles them. It is also extensible by plugins, which is a bit beyond the scope of this review.

In conclusion

So, what does this mean for you? If you work on large documents, with complex layer compositions and styles, then Pixelmator might not cut it. But if your goal is to create web graphics for your blog or even some general purpose home or small business print material, you will find Pixelmator a joy to use. The easy to use filters produce great results, the wand feature is very effective for cutting selections, and it provides most of the advanced functionality should you need it. With a gorgeous interface, nippy animations, and helpful UI enhancements, Pixelmator may just be the 'Photoshop for the rest of us'.

Pixelmator, currently in version 1.2, comes at a very affordable $59. Existing users are eligible for free updates to all 1.x releases, so 1.3 will be a free update as well. A public beta is scheduled to be released in a day or two, followed by the final release a couple of weeks later. I highly recommend that you grab the free demo and check it out for yourself.

For further discussions, check out the original post on the blog »

Feature

Deconstructing the OS X Color Picker

Everyone has used the OS X Color Picker. Whenever you're working on something and need to choose a colour, this is what pops up. "Not this thing again!" A quick glance through the color picker and you wish you had more control. Well, its there, but perhaps you don't realise it.

An introduction to the Color Picker

The Color Picker is a very versatile tool that uses up very little real estate and resources and is highly extendible using plugins. Using just the default Color Picker, I shall explore the various options available and how to juice them for what they're worth.

As you can see, the tool appears to be very plain and useless. Going through the various tabs isn't going to yield much either. However, the very first tab itself is fully functional and more than enough for most users.

The first thing you want to do is resize the picker. Making the wheel bigger not only lets you eyeball those colors better but will allow the mouse to select finer variations in the gradient. It's just better.

Picking colours

Selecting colours is simple, but way different from Photoshop. In the picker, we select the Hue and Saturation in the wheel, while adjusting the tint in the vertical slider on the right. If you remember correctly, we select the saturation and brightness in the box in Photoshop, while sliding up different hues in the vertical slider.

Now, what if you want to pick a colour right from your desktop? One would usually invoke the Digital Color Meter or some other colour picking tool. But it's right there in the Color Picker! Just click the magnifying glass button and you can then scout for colours anywhere on your workspace.

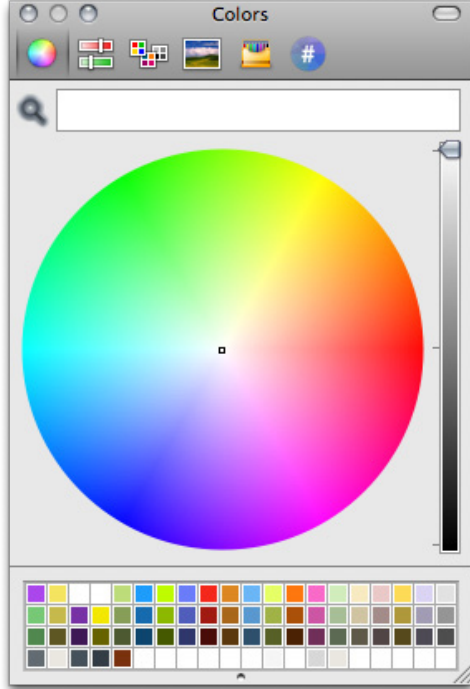You can, of course, use the colour sliders in the next tab to choose your colours if you so choose. Another interesting way is to use the Image Palettes. You could have your color scheme made into a jpeg, which just needs to be dropped into the default "Spectrum". Resize the colour palette to magnify your images. The best part is that those images stay there for good, so you only have to do this once.
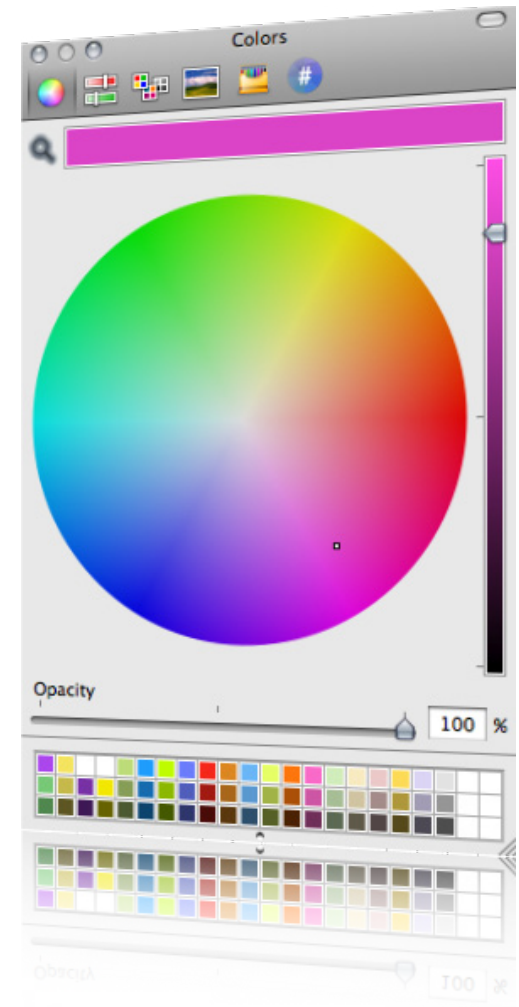
Organising your colours

Next, you want to increase the swatches lined up at the bottom. Supporting up to a maximum of 160 swatches, these are really useful. Since the same Color Picker is available across all applications, the swatches are also accessible across applications. For instance, suppose you picked up a colour in Pages; you can immediately switch to Coda and use that same colour in your web design. I would recommend you line up your colours in vertical columns with the lightest shade up. To add a colour to the swatch, drag the large rectangle colour bar at the top to one of the swatches.

If we move to the third tab "Color Palettes", you can either choose from the different palettes offered by default, or create one of your own. Adding colours involves either dragging them in from your swatches or manually selecting them in your Color Wheel and then dragging the colour from the big rectangle bar to the palette. Unfortunately, the picker names your colours in a boring 'Unnamed #", which needs to be manually renamed. Something like Indesign's automatic way of adding HSB values to the color name would have been helpful.

However, after you do name the colours, it can be very helpful if you find the swatches too difficult to differentiate. For instance, you might want to store the colours of your company logo in the palette, with names assigned to each one. Doing this once will eliminate any hassles later on and ensure that you always use just that right shade.

Using your precious colours

The most obvious way is to select the text or object and then apply the colour to it. It works perfectly and as it should. However, remember that you are using a Mac, and on the Mac we take drag-and-drop to the extreme!

If it is a text box or a bunch of shapes you are dealing with, simply drag and drop your colours on those objects. This works on text boxes, pie charts, strokes, and fills, and pretty much anything else that can be coloured. Paragraph or free flowing text, however, needs to be selected before colours can be dropped on them.

And, lest we forget, there's an opacity slider on most of those palettes.

Hexadecimal colour codes

This is one of the biggest deficiencies in the Color Palette. Crucial for web development, Hex digits are generally preferred over RGB values because they are easy to remember (at least a few important ones) and can produce quicker, accurate results.

Luckily, Color Picker is extensible using plugins. The most important one of the lot is the HexColor-Picker plugin.

Download the plugin and then create a "ColorPickers" folder in your Library if you haven't already. Dump the colorpicker file in there and restart all applications that would use the Color Picker.

Using the hex palette you can enter hex values and save them in your palette and even copy those values to the clipboard. It also recognises HTML colour names.
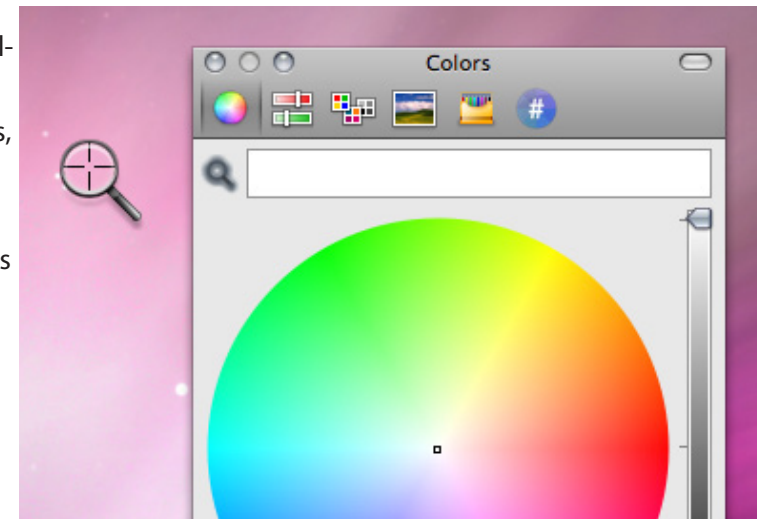
Other interesting plugins

There are a lot of other Color Picker plugins on the web. Some are free and others are paid. Most of them offer a free trial, so you can check 'em out before you go for it.

Mondrianum. If you've read this article so far, you must have been to Adobe's Kuler website where you can choose from different community upload-ed colour schemes. How cool would it be to have those colour schemes right in your applications! The data is downloaded live from the website onto your Color Picker and can be saved as a swatch or palette for later use. What's more, it's displayed us-ing the slick Cover Flow interface! (Free)

Painters Picker. If you do anything painting related, this plugin will come in handy. It has some of the usual complimentary colours and some other complex calculations. ($25)

A Better Color Picker. The Shades Color Picker adds an additional pane to the standard Apple Color Picker. It is designed to help you choose colours by showing you grids of related colours. Shades uses Hue - Saturation - Brightness (HSB) colour coordinates which many people find more intuitive than Red - Green - Blue (RGB) colour coor-dinates. To use Shades, you choose a center colour, a step size, and a colour coordinate (one of H, S, or B) to hold constant. Shades then draws a grid of related colours. ($18).

Saving or sharing your colours

Note that within the Color Palette tab of the picker, you can load new colour sets but not save them. The simplest way is to copy over the colour set files from your ~/Library/Color folder. You can also delete any images you might have added to the Image Palette (which you can't delete from there itself).

Launching the picker as its own App

Not all applications support the Color Picker. How, then, do you access your precious swatches? Well, it turns out (thanks to a tip on Mac OS X Hints) that you can run a simple AppleScript to launch the Picker right from your Dock.

Open up your Script Editor (Applications » Utili-ties » Script Editor), and type in

choose color

Save it as an Application (you can set an icon to it if you like and keep it wherever you would oth-erwise keep your Apps (hint: your Applications folder). Now you can pick colours from anywhere and use them directly as hex values in any app.

One more thing…

In Photoshop, the very first option in the prefer-ences is the colour palette. Choosing Apple will bring up the Color Picker right in Photoshop if you want. This functionality is not available for Illustra-tor and InDesign which use a different system for colours.

Multiplex

coming November 2008

www.multiplexapp.com

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labs.indyhall.org

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Mailplane

You like threaded conversations, googling your inbox, and you prefer labels over folders. You really love Gmail.

If yes: You are on the right track. Continue to use the Gmail web interface you know and love, but from Mailplane instead of your web browser: Mailplane makes you more productive and saves you precious time.

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Reader Surveys

The Smoking Apples reader surveys go beyond normal reviews. We ask the people who actually use the products what they feel about them. No professional reviews here, only what the people think. This time round, we take on the MacBook/Pro and the glossy issue. The question was, after 15 days of owning the new mac, would they have chosen a matter display, or stuck with the gloss.

With the release of the new MacBooks, Apple has done away with the matte screens on its 15-inch MacBook Pros and is only offering the glossy option. Currently, the only matte displays in Apple's entire lineup are the old Cinema Displays and the one on the 17-inch MacBook Pro, both of which may soon be upgraded to glossy as well.

This has obviously triggered a lot of whining in the very vocal Apple community. By the looks of it, everyone seems to want matte. So I decided to do a survey, asking only those who have actually purchased either of the new notebooks which display they preferred. I posed the question to our Twitter followers, scoured the Internet forums, and personally confirmed each of the statements.

Surprisingly, most of the users I spoke to are not worried about the glossy screens. Aside from comments on popular blogs (which I can't confirm), I couldn't find any

MacBook user who was not satisfied with the display. Here are just some of the replies I got for the new glossy displays.

"I was worried about glossy screen due to the whining, but I dont have any problems except for few more fingerprints and some glare," says one of the replies on Twitter.

"If you 'look' at the glare, then you can see it. But if you can get that out of your head, the glare is almost non visible. And if the reflection is too much, just tilting the screen a bit makes it go away. I was very disappointed at first when they said glossy only, but the display is so bright and vivid that I just can't think of going back to a matte display," answers another new MacBook owner.

"It's *beautiful* but the glass gets dirty easily and definitely has glare problems," says another reply on Twitter. Fingerprints are a major complaint when it comes to the glass displays. However, note that cleaning

the glass screen of the new MacBook is much easier since the glass extends right to the edges.

"I've used the MacBook Pro in bright sunlight, and it still is awesome. They are all just whining."

"It took me about 2 days to get used to the glass. Now when I go back to my old powerbook all the colors are dull. It's an odd feeling."

"It's awful. Makes me giddy looking at two different things at the same time. I'm giving this back and getting a cheap MacBook Pro from Amazon." Yeah, just about the only negative comment I could get (coupled with the one above).

For those looking to cut the glare, a lot of people have suggested Photodon's Antiglare films for the MacBook and the MacBook Pro. [Ed note: For what it's worth, no matter what anyone may say, I will never be in favour of a glossy display. I've kept my 17-inch MacBook Pro next to several MacBooks with glossy displays and I just cannot imagine myself having to use the latter for any length of time.]

What's your 'GlossBook' story? Have you held off from buying the new notebooks because of the glossy displays or are you looking forward to the sharper, more vivid display?

And the people revolted!

"I've purchased a new top-of-the line PowerBook or MacBook Pro every new edition model since 1992. I used a new MacBook Pro for an entire day trying to like it. I simply could not deal with the distracting reflections in the glossy screen. Too much eye fatigue. Maybe its OK for those who look at pictures and movies. I use mine to do real

work for usually 6 or more hours a day. Life is too short to have a tool that fatigues. So add me to what you refer to as a 'whiner'." says a very angry commenter.

Another user, a photographer by profession replies that he is very disappointed with the new MacBook and the Display.

"For a Photographer, this type of screen poses several problems :

1. Glossy screens tend to provide a more saturated range of colors - This will make calibrating the monitors to "simulate" what the image will look like on paper very difficult if not impossible.

2. Not only do the screens provide highly saturated colors, but also provide for high contrast images - This makes for very difficult setting of highlight and shadow detail, a very critical aspect in working with images !

3. The glossy screens are highly reflective - Working a whole day in front of a monitor that reflects will cause a lot of eye strain and become an annoyance.

I have already written to Apple (like many others) requesting them to reconsider, but feel that Apple will not provide an option for a matte screen. "

To sum things up (again).

It appears that the professionals are hung up on the matte displays while the consumers couldn't be more happy about. The obvious solution would be for Apple to provide the matte option on their pro line of products, but that isn't going to fly well with Apple.

To participate in this discussion, visit the post on Smoking Apples ».

Review

Picturesque, the Definitive Review

So you've set up a nice blog, have some nice content, 'cool' widgets and flashy tag clouds. But great content needs to be backed up by good imagery, without which those words will just get lost in the cloud.

However, not everyone has $600 to spend on Photoshop and learn about layer masks, transparencies, and the added trouble of doing all that every time you want to create something awesome. Of course, you could go for the $60 Pixelmator, but it still doesn't eliminate the need for the steps needed to polish your images.

Acqualia Software's Picturesque is an image editor that encompasses a set of effects so easy and quick to apply that anyone can produce great results within seconds. You can fine tune those effects, turn them on and off, and batch export dozens of images at once, ready for publishing on the web. All this is done in a slick UI that even grandpa would be able to operate (for some reason, we just can't resist bringing good ol' grandpa into the equation).

The User Interface

On launch, Picturesque loads up a light grey window, ready to accept any images. You can drag images into the window, use the menubar options to load images, access your iPhoto library from the integrated iLife media browser and, of course, you can also drag images to the dock icon and it will load them up.

I had used Picturesque back when it was still a 1.0 app. The functionality was present but the UI wasn't very fascinating (even though it did win an Apple Design Award in the Best Student app category). With version 2, the Picturesque team has completely overhauled the user interface and seem to have fine tuned all of those effects, making each of them indispensable to the package. Following a one-window interface model, all of the options, controls, and thumbnails are contained within the main window of the application. The only possible floating palette is the iLife media browser.
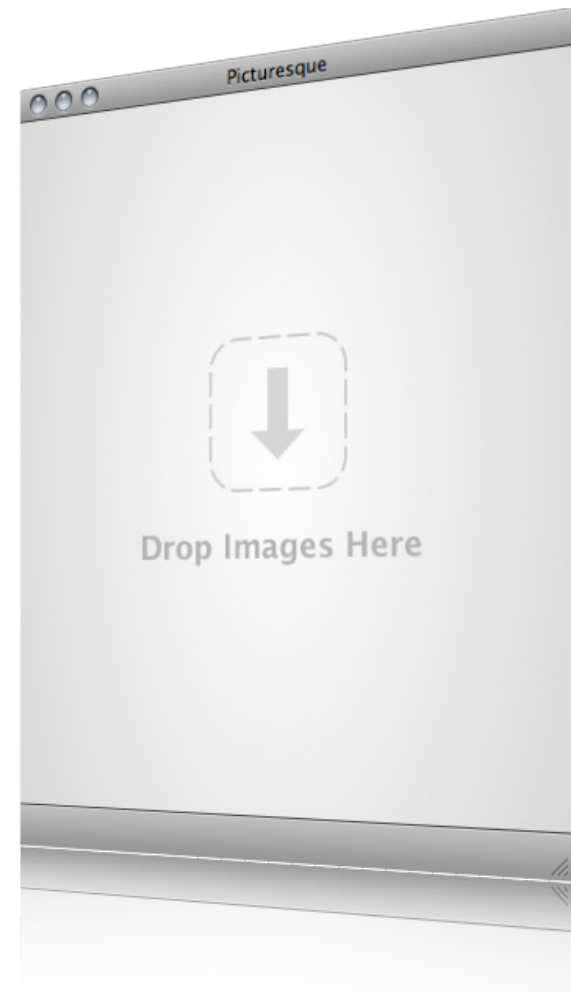
The Effects

Perspective: Remember those tutorials you tried for getting your image into a 3D perspective? And if this involved adding a reflection, it meant at least a good 15 minutes to get it just right, and after that you have to figure out how to get rid of the jagged edges. Newly added in Picturesque 2, the perspective adjustment allows you to effortlessly switch from one side to another, adjust the depth, the tilt and, more importantly, do all of this on hundreds of images at one go.

Reflection: Granted, reflections aren't the most difficult things to achieve in most image editors. However, getting that layer mask right involves multiple drags of the gradient tool. If all that sounds greek to you, then you will be happy to know that adding a perfect reflection involves the click of a button in Picturesque. And while there are free widgets that can add reflections, none of them give you the level of control over the output that is possible with Picturesque.

Very often I've used Picturesque to create a reflection which I've imported into Photoshop, just because it is so much easier.

Curve: This is one of the neatest features that really makes images stand out from the crowd. With just a few clicks, you can cut out curves on any or all of the four sides of the image. The output is stunning and, coupled with a reflection, is definitely going to get noticed.

Shadow: The shadow tool lets you add a drop shadow to an image. Not something groundbreaking, but it gets the job done. It does have a "glow" setting though, which puts a light halo behind the image instead of a tradition drop shadow. I've yet to figure out a situation where one would use such an effect but it's there.

Stroke: Adds a line around the image. Compared to the rounded edges of a stroke applied in Photoshop, Picturesque's stroke edges are sharp. Coupled with a drop shadow, this can add a photo-frame effect.

Crop: Performs a basic crop function. I did find that the thick bounding box of the crop tool made it difficult to judge how much of an image you are going to crop. Thankfully, all the changes are non-destructive and you can crop out more or even uncrop parts that were cropped in excess.

Features

Presets: This feature lets you save your adjustments (except for the crop function) in a preset so you can quickly apply it to another image in the future. This not only saves time but keeps your images consistent across your blog or website.
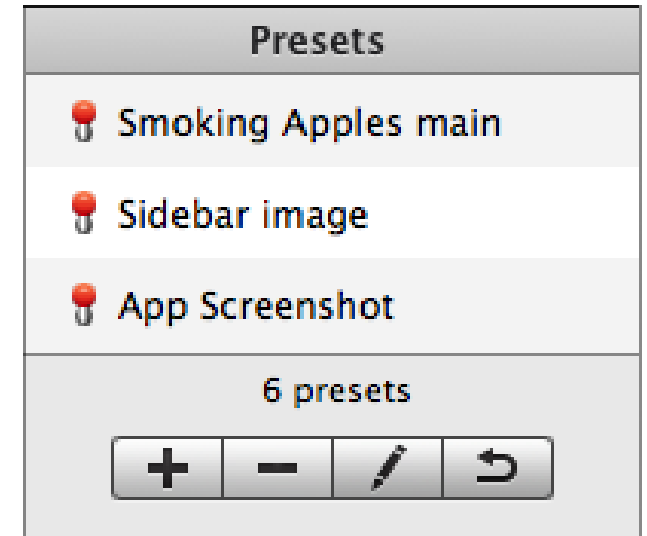
The iLife Media browser: You all know this little palette. In the case of Picturesque, it shows you only the photos. However, the palette is not the new one we see with Pages and other applica-

tions. It has no support for Events so you might have a tough time finding your images.

The Preferences: There are none. Except for the "show current image in dock icon", they could have easily done away with the preferences! This is what good UI design is all about.

Saving: You can then save the image as a PNG, including all the transparency, or as a Jpeg using the background colour you have set. The Save All dialog brings up some options, including an option to resize all the images to a particular size. You can thus use Picturesque as a plain batch image resizer without adding any effects.

The bad stuff

The same adjustments are applied to all the loaded images. So changing a little bit for any image will result in changes to all the loaded images. Very often each image needs slightly different adjustments and this is not possible if you want to export them all at once.

One thing that is missing is the straightening tool. Very often we come across crooked images, and the only way to straighten them would be in iPhoto or Photoshop. This could very well be implemented in the crop tool.

The thumbnail bar at the top is not resizeable. This makes it difficult to choose between images, especially if you have a bunch of similar shots you want to compare.

To sum up

Picturesque can turn into an indispensable tool for web publishers (even those who already own Photoshop or Pixelmator) who want quick and easy high production value imagery. The ease of use, an excellent UI (sprinkled with just the right amount of core animation effects), and the batch processing options just blow the competition out of the water. In fact, there is no such tool on the Windows end, and there probably never will be. At $39, it is not something you would buy on an impulse, but if these are the kinds of functions you need, it is well worth it.

There is, of course, a trial version », which I urge you to try out.

The Smoking Apples giveaway!

In collaboration with the Picturesque team, Smoking Apples had a giveaway of a free license. Unfortunately, that boat has sailed. But, we have regular such giveaways on our blog, so keep an eye out for more smoking offers!

Nevertheless, you can still voice our your opinion on this amazing piece of software on the original blog post ».

The Smoking Apples Genius Bar

Didn't find the answer to your question in our awesome articles? Need some help with any particular problem no one knows the solution to? Anything Apple, anything Mac, anything iPhone. The Smoking Apples Genius Bar is here to help.

I recently bought a NetGear NAS drive, and was wondering whether I could use it with Time Machine. If not, can you suggest an alternative backup solution that would work for me?

There are three ways you can officially get Time Machine backups working. One is directly connected USB or Firewire storage. Next, is if you access an external drive attached to a networked Leopard machine. And third, is the wireless solution, Time Capsule.

However, a hack exists, that allows you to back up to any network attached drive, be it a NAS, a drive on a Windows PC, or more specifically, a drive attached to an Airport Extreme. Just enter the command in the Terminal, and you will find all the shared drives to choose from.

> *"sudo defaults write com.apple.systempreferences TMShowUnsupportedNetworkVolumes 1"*

That being said, use this at your own risk. This is not an officially supported feature, and there might be a situation where your data might go corrupt.

Recently I sold my Mac mini and bought a MacBook. However, I forgot to deauthorize my Mac mini. This means I have I less authorised machine for my iTunes account. Is it possible to remotely deauthorize that machine?

There is no direct way to deauthorize a single machine. However, once you reach your total of 5 authorized computers, you get the option to deauthorize all your computers from your iTunes account, at once. Then you can go back and reauthorize all the machines you currently posess. Note that this full-scale deauthorization can be performed only once a year.

If for some reason you must have your computer deauthorized, you can contact the Apple iTunes Support », where a service exec will remotely deauthorize your Mac or PC..

I'm a recent switcher and am missing the Windows Lock Screen feature. The require-password-after-screensaver option is no good as a new user cannot login. Is there any method or third party tool to take care of this?

The feature you are talking about is hidden in the Keychain Access application (Applications » Utilities » Keychain Access). Once you launch the app, get into the Preferences (⌘ + ,) and checkmark "Show status in menubar". This will put a padlock icon from where you can choose the Lock Screen option.

You may also check out a third party application "WinSwitch", which will allow you to do a lot more than just locking your screen.

Need some help with your Mac? Google not helping out much? Email us at genius@smokingapples for personalised support.

Review

Ripit: The New Age DVD Ripping Application

With the introduction of Core Animation in Leopard, Mac applications have taken a leap to the next level of eye candy effects. The latest to follow this trend is Ripit, a DVD ripper that brings simplicity and a cool UI to the boring process of ripping a DVD.

The Interview

A small group of like minded individuals found each other by the magic of the Internet and have begun working on some amazing projects at Indy Hall Labs. Sounds very much like how the Smoking Apples team got together, doesn't it? The goal of the team (theirs, not ours) is to bring some fun new applications that are not only good to look at but provide improved usability by means of innovative user interfaces and capable engines that drive them from the inside.

However, 'the Labs' is not your average company. "The idea is that small apps should be built kinda like the way movies are built: Someone with an idea assembles financing from the community, secures talent by paying outright or with equity, the team builds the product and then releases it. After that, the team breaks up and the participants are free to reassemble themselves to build something different. The 'labs is the facilitator that greases the wheels of this process, and handles all of the boring payment-processing/accounting/stuff and cuts checks to the participants/investors when profits roll in. We're working out the details as we go", explains Jason Allum, lead developer of Ripit.

Ripit is the first project out the door for this incredibly talented group. "It was a ton of fun to build", says Jason. "With RipIt, we decided to take a new approach to both the UI design (keeping things simple) as well as the design of the actual Rip engine."

Jason then explains the core functionality inside Ripit. "RipIt works by emulating a DVD player, down

to the instructions and registers. It follows the program of the disc, copying all of the nooks and crannies that are accessible to a player, and deftly skipping around the bits that are placed there precisely to confuse other, lesser rippers. We've integrated failure feedback mechanisms into
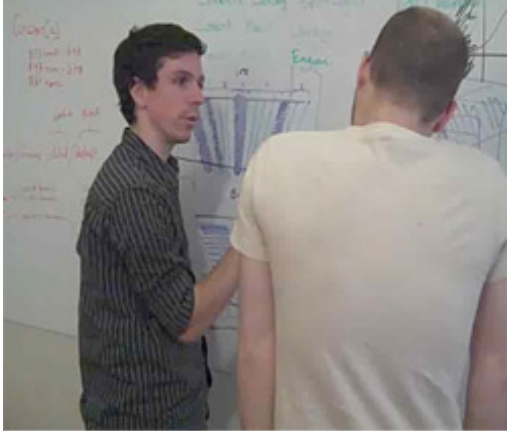
RipIt, so that in the rare event that something does go wrong, you can report all of the information that our engineers will need to fix the problem – this usually takes less than a week. We've also integrated DiscIdent, a new service that uses "fingerprinting" techniques to provide metadata (in this case, disc titles) for the discs you insert."

Wowed by all of this, I asked what the possibilities of doing all this in a Windows environment would be. "It's not so much a matter of whether these things could be built on Windows, but whether anyone here wants to do it!" With that, I knew Ripit was in good hands. Jason mentioned some great new projects that they have in the works and I can't wait to review every single one of them! That said, let's go back to what we came here to do…

Ripit, the review

I slipped in a DVD of The Lord of the Rings and launched the application. Ripit immediately recognised the disc and labelled it appropriately. The beauty of the interface is that it has just two buttons—Rip and Eject. I guess they really meant it when they said they would have a simple UI!

Clicking the Rip button starts the ripping process, which shows the percentage completed, time remaining, and the disc starts to spin! A single Stop button then adorns the little window.

"The Ripit engine has been tested with over 11,000 discs (at the time I write this) with only 10 discs that are known to fail", says Jason. Wait a minute—what! As Jason explained earlier, Ripit anonymously reports back any successful or failed disc back to the developers. Of course, you can turn this off in the preferences if you so choose.

Performance

With the small footprint that this app takes up, the performance is nothing short of stunning. Ripit takes up just 21MB of RAM and uses up a maxi-

mum of 18% CPU on my Core Duo 2.0GHz iMac. A 6.7GB DVD took 25 minutes to complete.

Once the rip is complete, you can either eject the disc or show the movie saved on your hard drive. The file is saved as a .dvdmedia file in your movies folder. This file opens up in DVD Player complete with all the menus and other DVD features.

The missing bits

Ripit cannot rip into 'MP4' video that is suitable for iTunes and a lot of other portable devices, including the iPods and iPhone. "We believe that with disk space becoming cheaper by the day, there is significant value in keeping the original movie with all of its subtitles, menus, alternate angles, and audio intact."

However, after having gone through the unique feedback page (and getting further confirmation from Jason), it appears that they are already working on an H.264 ripper that will export directly to iTunes. I eagerly await this feature.

Conclusion

If DVD ripping means anything to you, I highly recommend giving Ripit a serious look. The smooth interface, the responsive attitude of the developers, and the features planned for the future may just make this little app the ultimate ripper for the Mac. Ripit costs $18.99 for a single user license, and you can take it for a spin for seven days for free before you're expected to spend the dough.

The Ultimate Guide to Choosing the Right MacBook

With all three MacBook lines—MacBook, MacBook Pro, and MacBook Air—now sporting enclosures machined out of a single block of aluminium and black, backlit keyboards with chicklet style keys, it's more difficult than ever to zero in on which particular model and configuration to go for. Further complicating matters are the new prices for all these notebooks which, to say the least, are freakin' exhorbitant!

Worry not though, dear readers, because where there is a problem, there exists a solution, specially if it's Smoking Apples we're talking about. In this article, I've tried to highlight the key differences between the various configurations that these notebooks are available in (eight in total) and point out the positives and negatives of each one. At the end, I'll leave you with two recommendations, one for the budget conscious buyer and another for those of you who want to go all out and have the cash to do so.

Given that introduction, I'm sure you expected a thousand word essay detailing the nitty gritty of the different MacBook configurations. But do you really want that? It would be a waste of precious resources and, frankly, quite a boring way of doing things. What I have instead is a ginormous table containing all the information you need to know about the new MacBooks to make an informed choice.

It should be noted that wherever the word "option" or "optional" has been used, it is implied that the part in question is not included with the standard configuration and you may be charged extra for its inclusion. Obviously, the price of said parts have not been included in the prices listed in the chart. Also,

while we're on the subject of prices, I'd like to make it clear that the prices in USD are not inclusive of taxes since there is no uniform tax applicable to these notebooks. The prices in INR, on the other hand, are inclusive of the Value Added Tax, amounting to four percent, and have been rounded off to the nearest Rs. 100. The prices in USD have been taken from the US Apple Online Store and the Indian ones are courtesy the Indian Apple Online Catalog. Actual prices are subject to change and may vary from the ones shown above.

Although I tried to cover even the minutest of differences that might influence your decision, the limited size of

Which MacBook are you?

Enclosure	Polycarbonate	**Precision Aluminum Unibody**	Precision Aluminum Unibody	Precision Aluminum Unibody	**Precision Aluminum Unibody**	Anodised Aluminium	Precision Aluminum Unibody	Precision Aluminum Unibody
Glass buttonless trackpad	No	**Yes**	Yes	Yes	**Yes**	No	No	No
Processor	2.1GHz Intel Core 2 Duo	**2.0GHz Intel Core 2 Duo**	2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo	2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo	**2.53GHz Intel Core 2 Duo**	2.5GHz Intel Core 2 Duo	1.6GHz Intel Core 2 Duo	1.86GHz Intel Core 2 Duo
L2 cache	3MB shared	**3MB shared**	3MB shared	3MB shared	**6MB shared**	6MB shared	6MB shared	6MB shared
System Bus	800MHz	**1066MHz**	1066MHz	1066MHz	**1066MHz**	800MHz	1066MHz	1066MHz
Memory	1GB 667MHz DDR2	**2GB 1066MHz DDR3**	2GB 1066MHz DDR3	2GB 1066MHz DDR3	**4GB 1066MHz DDR3**	4GB 667MHz DDR2	2GB 1066MHz DDR3	2GB 1066MHz DDR3
Hard drive	120GB Serial ATA; 5400 rpm	**160GB Serial ATA; 5400 rpm**	250GB Serial ATA; 5400 rpm	250GB Serial ATA; 5400 rpm	**320GB Serial ATA; 5400 rpm**	320GB Serial ATA; 5400 rpm	120GB Serial ATA; 4200 rpm	128GB solid-state drive
Optional 128GB SSD	No	**Yes**	Yes	Yes	**Yes**	Yes	No	-
Slot-loading optical drive	8x SuperDrive	**8x SuperDrive**	8x SuperDrive	8x SuperDrive	**8x SuperDrive**	8x SuperDrive	No	No
Graphics	Intel X3100 144MB shared	**NVIDIA 9400M 256MB shared**	NVIDIA 9400M 256MB shared	NVIDIA 9600M GT 256MB	**NVIDIA 9600M GT 512MB**	NVIDIA 8600M GT 512MB	NVIDIA 9400M 256MB shared	NVIDIA 9400M 256MB shared
Display	13.3-inch glossy	**13.3-inch LED glossy**	13.3-inch LED glossy	15-inch LED glossy	**15-inch LED glossy**	17-inch LED glossy/antiglare	13.3-inch LED glossy	13.3-inch LED glossy
FireWire	400	**No**	No	800	**800**	400 and 800	No	No
USB	Two USB 2.0 ports	**Two USB 2.0 ports**	Two USB 2.0 ports	Two USB 2.0 ports	**Two USB 2.0 ports**	Three USB 2.0 ports	One USB 2.0 port	One USB 2.0 port
Audio	Built-in stereo speakers	**Built-in stereo speakers**	Built-in stereo speakers	Built-in stereo speakers	**Built-in stereo speakers**	Built-in stereo speakers	Built-in mono speaker	Built-in mono speaker
Configure to order options	250GB (5400-rpm) hard drive 4GB 667MHz DDR2 SDRAM	**320GB (5400-rpm) hard drive 4GB 1066MHz DDR3 SDRAM**	320GB (5400-rpm) hard drive 4GB 1066MHz DDR3 SDRAM	320GB (7200-rpm) hard drive 4GB 1066MHz DDR3 SDRAM	**320GB (7200-rpm) hard drive 4GB 1066MHz DDR3 SDRAM**	320GB (7200-rpm) hard drive	No	No
Replaceability	Battery and memory	**Battery and hard drive**	Battery and hard drive	Battery and hard drive	**Battery and hard drive**	Battery and memory	No	No
Height	1.08 inches (2.75 cm)	**0.95 inch (2.41 cm)**	0.95 inch (2.41 cm)	0.95 inch (2.41 cm)	**0.95 inch (2.41 cm)**	1.0 inch (2.59 cm)	0.16-0.76 inch (0.4-1.94 cm)	0.16-0.76 inch (0.4-1.94 cm)
Weight	5.0 pounds (2.27 kg)	**4.5 pounds (2.04 kg)**	4.5 pounds (2.04 kg)	5.5 pounds (2.49 kg)	**5.5 pounds (2.49 kg)**	6.6 pounds (2.99 kg)	3.0 pounds (1.36 kg)	3.0 pounds (1.36 kg)
Price (INR / USD)	Rs. 58,800 / $999	**Rs. 75,800 / $1,299**	Rs. 91,800 / $1,599	Rs. 1,13,800 / $1,999	**Rs. 1,41,800 / $2,499**	Rs. 1,54,800 / $2,799	Rs. 1,01,800 / $1,799	Rs. 1,41,800 / $2,499

–Aayush Arya | Editor–in–Chief, Smoking Apples

my MacBook Pro's display and my propensity to overlook things got the better of my carefulness and I missed a few points. With an apologetic pout firmly in place, I'm listing them here for your comparison pleasure:

ExpressCard/34 slot: All three MacBook Pro models come equipped with an ExpressCard/34 slot. None of the models in the other two lineups do.

Illuminated keyboard: All MacBook Pro and MacBook Air models and the highest end ($1,599) MacBook have keyboards that get automatically backlit in the dark with the help of discreet ambient light sensors. The $999 and $1,299 MacBooks do not have this feature.

Latch-less design: With the updates on October 14th, Apple made the new 15-inch MacBook Pros join the ranks of its MacBook brethren by replacing the latches that held the lid in place with hidden magnets that serve the same purpose. Since the MacBook Air also features a latch-less design, the 17-inch MacBook Pro ends up being the only notebook in the lineup to suffer from this little flaw.

The Recommendation

As should be evident from the table shown above, I have one recommendation each from the mid-range category and the high-end one. Of course, no Apple notebook qualifies as a low-end product, given that the cheapest MacBook you can currently officially buy sells for at least Rs. 58,800.

For people who do not want to spend north of one lac bucks on a notebook, think that a 13.3-inch screen will suffice, and do not want the added bulk of the meatier MacBook Pros, the $1,299 MacBook seems to offer the best bang for your buck. At the not-quite-so-terribly-expensive price of Rs. 75,800, this notebook offers a stunning new design, an all glass Multi-touch capable buttonless trackpad, a 2.0GHz Core 2 Duo processor, 2GB of RAM, a 160GB hard drive, and one of those swanky new "Made in India" NVIDIA GeForce 9400M integrated graphics chipsets. The only things lacking are a FireWire port and an illuminated keyboard. If you think you can do without them and do not want to spend an arm and a leg on a new notebook, this is the machine for you.

But if you want all the power of a desktop computer from your notebook, a MacBook won't quite cut it for you. What you need is one of the new 15-inch MacBook Pros, the higher end $2,499 model, to be precise. Powered by a speedy 2.53GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor, 6MB shared L2 cache, 4GB 1066GHz DDR3 SDRAM, a 320GB hard drive, and a scorching performer in the form of an NVIDIA GeForce 9600M GT dedicated graphics card with 512MB of memory, this is a mean machine. There's also a FireWire 800 port and an NVIDIA GeForce 9400M integrated graphics chipset thrown in for good measure, for those times when the notebook is running on battery and every watt counts. Optionally, you can crank up the specs to include a 2.8GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor and either a 320GB 7200 rpm hard drive (instead of the 5400 rpm one that is included by default) or a 128GB solid state drive. At Rs. 1,41,800 for the base configuration though, this notebook is clearly for the pros, and ones with deep pockets at that.

The Conclusion

There you have it, a look at exactly what each MacBook in the current lineup is capable of and a comprehensive chart detailing every single spec for your comparison needs. Feel free to copy the chart onto your hard drive—it's just a PNG image and dragging it out of Safari and anywhere onto your hard drive should do the trick—and study it at leisure. Hopefully, this article made the decision much easier for you. If you plan to purchase one of these beauties, do let us know in the comments.

Essentials

A Collection of 10 Free Awesome Mac Screensavers

Screensavers used to serve the purpose of preventing burn-in of your display screen. But modern displays doesn't need this. So screensavers have now become just a tool to show off or make your desktop look pretty while you are away. Mac OS X has some visually stunning screensavers. We'll take a look at some free to use screensavers.

High in oomph factor, entertainment quotient and stress busting screensaver solutions for your viewing pleasure. Click the image to go to the screensaver home page and download it. Enjoy the show.

MovingPhotos 3D
Builds a 3D building structure with photos.
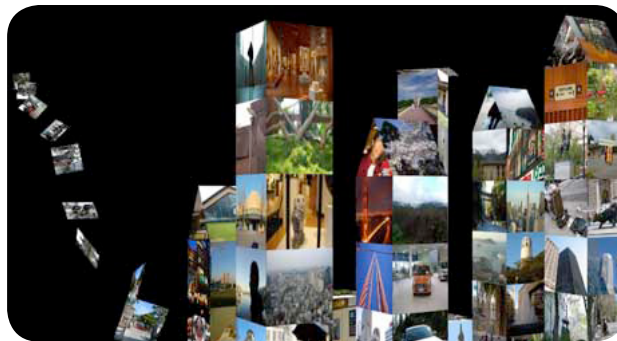
Anemona
Anèmona is a particle-based screensaver which make movements like the plants in sea.
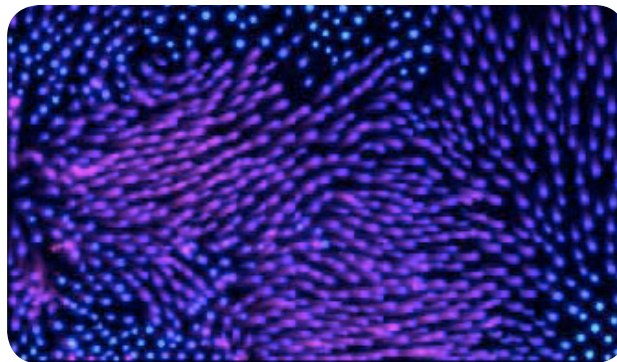
Fenetres Volantes
The moment this screensaver starts, your currently open windows panes start to fly around your wallpaper! It's nice to watch your panes snap back in place after their short flight.

PolarClock
A cool clock screensaver. Also check out Fliqlo, another clock based screensaver.
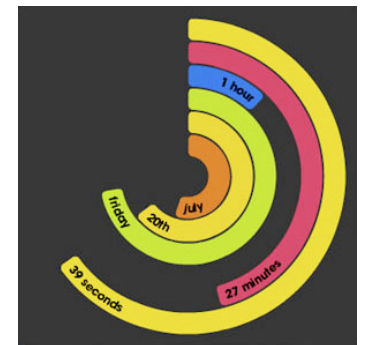
Arc [Digg Labs]

Digg labs tools provide a visual perspective of Digg activities. Arc displays stories wrapped around a sphere. Arc trail people as they Digg stories across topics. Check out their other visual stunning screensaver models—Swarm, BigSpy and Stacks.

Kernel Panic Screensaver

Crash your Mac with the Kernel Panic screensaver. On a mouse move, I felt as if I woke up in middle of a nightmare. The evil thing is, in the preview of the screensaver will seem like a harmless shapes as you would see in a kaleidoscope.


Time Machine

This one bring back the visually stunning Time Machine feel of Leopard. Keep starring at it for 2 minutes with your lights switched off. You'll have a feeling as if you're aboard the Chandrayaan-1.

The iTunes 8 Visualizer

Remember the new iTunes visualizer which comes with latest version of iTunes? It's awesome and would make a stunning screensaver. Here's a guide as how you can use your iTunes visualizer as screensaver.
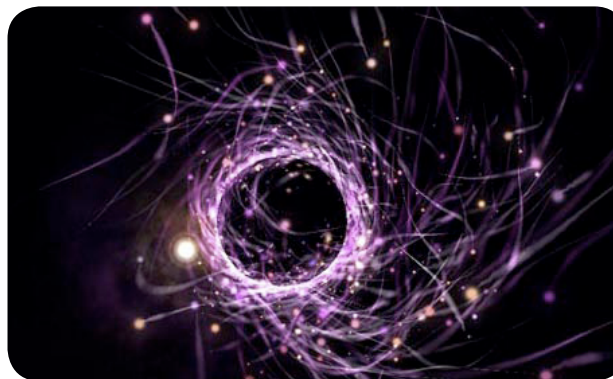
LotsaWater

Simulate the effect that you get when you desktop is filled with water. The effect is amazing, like when throw a stone on a pond, creating ripples on your desktop.

Screensaver with your photos

Take a trip down the memory lane, on your favourite street. There's nothing like gazing through your photos. A smile on your face is guaranteed. OS X can pick up photos from your iPhoto/Aperture library. You can make it select photos from a particular set in case you've organized your library in projects.

Leopard too has some good in-built screensavers notably Arabesque and Flurry (all time favourite of many Mac users).

Is there any other interesting screensaver that you think we've slipped? Share it with us in the comments on the blog post.

A. I. Disk »

This week, we take the 'App Store Day' wagon to the folks over at Readdle and explore their A.I.Disk app for the iPhone.

We here at Smoking Apples are great fans of the iPhone and 3 of us already have a MobileMe subscription. As much as we like the sync features of iDisk, it was always a problem to access your files on the move given that MobileMe lacks a mobile interface or even a dedicated app on the iPhone. Readdle's A.I.Disk is a app available for the iPhone that allows you to connect to any WebDAV storage on the web and access those files on the movie, right from your iPhone. Yes, that includes MobileMe's iDisk and even Box.net.

Let's take a closer look at what the app has to offer.

A.I.Disk's prime feature is its ability to connect to and browse through a number of WebDAV services on the web, including MobileMe, MyDisk.se and Box.net. Not only can you login to your iDisk

and access your own files, you can also browse the public folders of other MobileMe users. These files are downloaded onto the app when you first access them, thus giving you access to them anytime in the future. A progress bar tells you how much of the file has been 'received' by your iPhone, so you might want to be careful with larger files, specially if you're not on an unlimited connection.

You can create as many 'Online Identities' as you wish. Here in this screenshot, I've saved my personal iDisk and a friend's Public Folder. Take note that the public folder has the blue colored icon, unlike the pink iDisk icon. Tapping on either of the two gives you access to the folders hosted on the disk. A.I.Disk has a nifty little button on the top, which is aptly titled 'Get All' and lets you download all of them at one go.

To open a file, simply tap on the name an it opens up right in the app. A.I.Disk supports a wide array of file formats,, including PDF, doc, docx, xls, xlsx, ppt, pptx txt, fb2, rtf and even html. The bar at the bottom of the inbuilt viewer allows you to do the following functions:

• Bookmark
• Send the file(s) via Email to your contacts

- Scroll down multiple pages using the percentage bar
- View the file FullScreen

A.I.Disk's ability to work over EDGE, 3G and WiFi gives it an added advantage over the other FileSharing apps on the iPhone. I use my iDisk's Document folder as my primary Documents folder on the Mac, so I have access to all my documents, papers and reports on the go on my iPhone.

A.I.Disk is available for $7.99 from the App Store [iTunes Link] and is well worth the investment if you're serious about anytime access to your documents on your MobileMe iDisk.

Independent developer trying to get your app out there? If it is interesting enough, we'll gladly feature it in our AppStore reviews
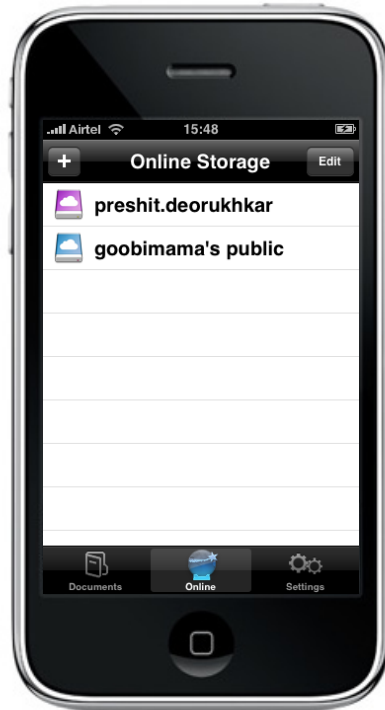
Cooliris »

On Monday morning (and, FYI, I hate Monday mornings), I was pleasantly surprised to find an email from the Cooliris team, announcing the release of Cooliris for the iPhone! Back in August, we'd reviewed Cooliris for Safari, a plugin which puts a whole new dimension to your web surfing experience. That same functionality has now been ported over to the iPhone, including the fantastic 3D wall.

On launch, you are presented with the 3D wall along with a default search. At the top lie two buttons—Discover and Search. While Discover lets you browse public feeds for a variety of categories like news, sports, technology, or anything related to the 2008 elections, Search gives you the power to conduct a search on Flickr, Google, deviantART, and a few other websites.

The interface is very fluid and looks stunning on the iPhone. Tilting the unit sideways moves the wall on either side. You can, of course, flick the wall to move it as well. Tapping any of the pictures brings it up front along with all the related information. Tapping on it again puts the image in fullscreen. You can also pinch in and out of the wall to make it smaller or larger, but the default size should be good enough for most people. Tapping on any of the links brings up the built-in Safari browser so you don't have to switch between applications.

One of the features that trumps the desktop version is the use of GPS. When I chose the News feed, it was all relevant to my location (India).

The application, however, can neither save any images locally nor can it bookmark them for future reference. You can only email the link using, what else, the email button. You are also limited in the number of websites that are shown and, unlike the desktop version, you cannot invoke Cooliris from the Safari browser. The Cooliris team promises that future versions will make it much similar to the desktop version in terms of functionality, as well as extend it beyond given the unique UI of the iPhone.

The best news among all this is that the app is totally free! I don't know how these guys do it (even the desktop version is free), but I'm not complaining. Go get your copy from the App Store.

The MacBook Pro Review

This past week, we received the new MacBook Pro at our test labs (Thanks, Aditya). Yes, we're aware how early we got our hands on it, but that's how things work here in India. In fact, Apple's new releases have been reaching the shores far more early compared to the previous years. I've had the pleasure of using the unit to my heart's content and besides a few cons, the new design is one of the best things Apple has produced in its entire history.

Since it has been quite a while now that the new products have been available for sale in the international markets, a wide array of blogs have already written in-depth reviews of the MacBook Pro. Our unboxing and product pictures are available in the gallery here. We urge you to take a look at the gallery », as we have some really awesome shots waiting for you.

The Packaging

During the October 14th Notebook event, Apple not only headlined the Unibody enclosure for the notebooks, but also gave special limelight to its products going green. While making the products lead-free, Apple has been working extensively on reducing the packaging size of the products, which was evident in the video released showcasing the manufacturing process.

The MacBook Pro's packaging is quite a lot different than its previous iterations. Apple's notebooks now come in white colored boxes, unlike the black ones for the previous generation. Apple has reduced the hight of the boxes by putting the accessories below the Macbook Pro, though it makes the box a wee bit thicker.

The Design:

The new MacBook Pros are slick. And they're beautiful. Think of them as the MacBook Air model, only thicker. Apple's design engineers seem to have put in countless

hours of work together before these machines were born. Every change on the new MacBook Pro has been well-thought out. Let's take a look at the few important ones:

1. No latch:

Unlike the MacBooks and the MacBook Air which make use of a magnetic latch system, the aluminum MacBook Pros had a physical latch system for keeping the lid closed. Not any more.

2. All ports on the left, DVD drive on the right:

How many times has it happened to you that you've to look on both sides on the notebook to find a certain port? All the ports on the MacBook Pro have now been moved to the left and the DVD drive is the only slot on the right of the MacBook Pro.

3. DisplayPort and FireWire 800:

Apple's new range of notebooks now ship with a DisplayPort instead of the mini-DVI or micro-DVI standards. Also, FireWire 400 has been left out, leaving only the FireWire 800 on the MacBook Pro.

4. Battery Indicator on the left:

This change may either be a positive change or a negative change, depending on your usage tactics. While Apple has certainly made it easier to access the indicator by moving it to the side, it is no longer attached to the battery itself. This is a heavy annoyance to power users to carry multiple batteries with them on the move, as there is no way to check the battery power unless it is connected to the MacBook Pro.

5. Easy access to HDD and Battery

The new design of the MacBook Pro makes it extremely easy to access and replace the HDD or battery. A bay cover at the back of the notebook, which pops out easily by lifting a small lever exposes the HDD and battery. While the battery can be simply lifted by a tag, the HDD is firmly secured using a single screw.

6. Trackpad

It's revolutionary, to say the least. The MacBook Pro's trackpad is now made of glass and the engineers have, with some exceptional skill and a little magic, got the friction on it just right. Your fingers just glide on the new trackpad. The whole trackpad is now a complete button and you can even set the 'right-click' to the bottom left or right of the trackpad. With respect to size, the new trackpad is slightly bigger than its previous generation.

However, there have beens reports of the trackpad going rogue and refusing to register some clicks sometimes. Apple has already acknowledged this issue and has announced that a fix is coming soon.

7. Keyboard like the MacBook Air

The new range of Apple notebooks now feature a keyboard design just like the MacBook Air. The keys are individually placed and are black in color. Personally, typing on this keyboard was far better than the keyboard on my MacBook Pro, even though I've become used to the gray keys over the last few months. The keys are soft and much more responsive than the older keyboards.

8. Unibody Enclosure

The USP of the notebook range, the unibody enclosure is phenomenal. Not only does it make the MacBook Pro feel lighter, but also adds that sturdiness to it. The absence of the plastic border along the edges is a great plus point of the new design. The holes for the in-built speakers are different than the older ones and the on/off button has been moved to the top.

Overall, the new design of Apple's notebook range is a remarkable improvement in their design process. Pictures don't do justice to these new products and a visit to the nearest Apple retailer is definitely a must.

Graphics

Fortunately, we received the second model of MacBook Pro range with the 2.53Ghz processor and 4GB of RAM, with the NVIDIA GeForce 9400M and 9600M GT GPUs onboard. Unfortunately, we weren't able to perform any game testing on the unit. thought there was a noticeable difference when using apps such as iMovie, FCP and playing HD video. All we can say is that this thing is fast!

For an indepth review of the speed times of the new MacBook Pro, check out the Macworld test labs report.

Glossy Screen

The Glossy screen gets a special mention. Apple's new range of MacBooks and MacBook Pros, along with the Cinema Displays 24" Cinema Display now ship with Glossy displays only. However, these are not the glossy displays that were available as an option with the earlier generations. These notebooks and display now come with a glozzy bezel over the screen that spreads from left to right, completely covering the screen.

Arguably, the screen has been the most talked about change in the new line of notebooks after the October 14th event. While a majority of the new customers claim that the screen's gloss is not unbearable, a large

number of Pro users are complaining that the glossy displays are just what they don't want.

What to we think?

If you're a casual user who uses the Mac for daily activities such as browsing, email, casual gaming, IM and similar activities, it won't take you long to adapt to the new screen. In fact, the only problem you'll face with the new screens is if you have a direct light source behind you. If you have a smart workspace with indirect lighting, the screen produces outstanding results. However, if you're a Pro user and often use apps such as Aperture/Lightroom for your professional work, you'd better stay away from these. Quite frankly, the screen is almost a dark mirror (Actual shot off the MacBook Pro screen).

We really hope Apple announces matte options soon, or they're going to have a lot of unhappy customers to deal with.

Verdict

Unlike Microsoft, Apple is known to implement new ideas and take bold decisions with their products, without the fear of worrying about the customers. In fact, Apple wants the customers to adapt to the emerging technologies and leave the old ones behind. With the unibody enclosure, DisplayPort, fantastic Multitouch trackpad, glossy screen and the in-built GPUs, the company has taken a giant leap ahead of its competitors. And these new features give you enough reason to go ahead buy these products.

Thank You!

We are most grateful that you chose to download and read the Smoking Apples magazine. Please send us your comments, feedback or even a knock knock joke to admin@smokingapples.com. Macs rule!

- Team Smoking Apples