The Apple Mac Buying Guide for Designers

The term designer covers many different fields, Graphic, Web, Motion or 3D Designer and whether you are buying your first computer or just need to upgrade, choosing the right Apple Mac can sometimes be difficult. Designers have many different needs and while you may love all things Apple, some are better for design than others. Do I need a retina screen, how much RAM and what kind of software are questions people often ask when searching for that perfect computer.

Why Macs?

One of the reasons designers use Mac is because of Apples graphic design history. Apple created the desktop publishing market back in 1985 with the original Apple Macintosh computer. The reason for choosing Macs was because of the software and fonts available as well as the user friendly graphics interface. Combined with software like Quark Express and the first LaserWriter printer, it became the dominant platform for Graphics Professionals. Apple also has traditionally given discounts to the educational communities. A decision that has helped build life long users.

While PC’s have caught up in regards to their graphic abilities, there are still many reasons to love the Mac operating system as a designer. The software support has increased tremendously, the ease of use right out of the box, highly detailed screens and the ability to run virtual software to emulate Windows and Linux systems can help with developing web sites.

Power Users

Lets start with the Mac Pro, a very powerful computer. If you work with motion, photos or are a graphic designer where color accuracy is important to you then the Mac Pro is for you. The advantage of the Mac Pro is that you can use any monitor you want. Monitors for other Apple computers are Glossy and for people who work in Graphic Design, they tend to prefer matt screens because they are more accurate to what gets printed. Graphic Designers tend to work with larger files with most images being 300ppi for press quality and faster processors are important.

Motion designers are the perfect candidate for the Mac Pro with fast processors, large hard drives and the ability to have multiple screens. They are the most flexible and customizable for you needs. Video editing applications need fast processors and more Ram, combine that with a SSD drive and applications like After Effects open in seconds. The only consideration is the size of the SSD drives are smaller than traditional hard drives and you may need to have external drives for mass storage. Luckily, the Mac Pro has many six Thunderbolt 2 ports and four USB 3.0 ports for all your storage needs.

Portability and Speed

If you are a designer on the go, but still need a fast computer, then the MacBook Pro is for you. Web and Graphic designers will appreciate the Retina Displays for diving into the details of their designs and nudging those pixels one at a time. MacBook Pros are capable of running all the Adobe Creative Cloud applications, as well as the major video editing applications. The lightweight of the laptop allows you to carry it easily for meeting at client offices and give presentations wherever you need to. You can do high quality work on the go, but the SSD hard drives are small and you may need external drives.

Studio Work

You fell in love with the Retina screens, but you don’t necessarily need to travel with your computer. In the past, the conventional wisdom was that if you were a serious graphics professional, you would only buy the latest Mac tower. Those days have passed and all you want is a simple; all in one solution that is reasonably priced but can still do everything designers need it to do. Well it sounds like you might want to check out the iMac with the high-resolution screen Retina 5K screen. Fill this computer up with RAM and a SSD drive and there isn’t much you can’t do. The glorious 27-inch screen is large enough for any designer and at just 5mm at its edge; the iMac has a pretty small footprint. The iMac works well for all types of designers, the screen resolution and fast processors make it an all around good computer. Not only are the images clear and have 25 percent more available color, but also the text is so sharp you’ll think you are reading a printed page. If storage is a concern, the iMac can hold up to 3 TB of data with their fusion drive and has plenty of ports for external drives.

iPads

Originally, the iPad was more a tool then a full-fledged computer, but with the introduction of the iPad Pro with a 12.9-inch screen and Retina display, designers should take it more seriously. A new addition to the iPad is the “Pencil” Apples version of a stylus, it’s even easier to get your ideas down and share it with coworkers and clients. Using Applications like Sketch, Paper and Autodesk Sketchbook, you can create everything from quick wireframes to full fledge drawings. With the Astropad Graphics Tablet app, you can turn your iPad into a Graphics Tablet or just use it as a second monitor with Duet Display app.

Layouts that work with Adobe CC can be created using the Adobe Comp CC App. You will get access to your Creative Cloud Libraries and be able to collaborate across multiple devices with Adobe Creative Sync. This allows you to start on your iPad and finish on your desktop. Once you finish your designs you can bring it to life with the Invision app. Invision helps designers create interactive wireframes that truly communicate your ideas quickly and flawlessly, creating dynamic presentations without coding. Ok, maybe you are itching to touch code. Try the Codea Scratchpad app to create games, edit code and bring to life any ideas you may have.

The iPad is also a great way to showcase your work to clients or for a job interview. It’s easier to pass around than a laptop and can passively watch or try it out for themselves. Apps like Portfolio for iPad or Minimal Folio can transform your iPad into a branded portfolio that will definitely impress people.

Accessories for Designers

An accessories that is often considered a must have for designers of all types, is a Wacom tablet. The Wacom tablets come in all different sizes and prices. Everything from the high end large Wacom Intuos Pro Professional Pen & Touch Tablet to the smaller more specific Intuos Draw, Art, Photo and Comic Tablets. If you already have an iPad and want to use it for sketching and drawing then try the Bamboo Fineline 2. The advance tip gives you precise control and pressure sensibility to draw smoother and quieter for that natural pen and paper feel.

If you want to go the more traditional route, try the Bamboo spark. Start writing with the stylus using your own paper and the smart folio will record each line and convert it digitally in an instant. You will be able to access the notes digitally through the Bamboo Spark app.

For ultimate control, Wacom makes the Cintiq tablet that comes in 13, 22 and 27-inch size. They are touch screen displays that are pressure sensitive and allow you to use the Pro Pen directly on the screen to edit images. You can also touch to pan, zoom, rotate or activate on screen controls. The Cintiq works with many of your favorite applications, from Adobe® Photoshop® to Autodesk® Maya® or Corel® Painter®.

A new type of controller that has been created and will be released in November 2015 is Palette. The controller is very different and innovative in that it is modules that you can customize to perform special tasks. For instance, they have created physical sliders to control virtual ones like Brightness or contrast in Adobe® Photoshop®. Palette also makes knobs to control things like opacity and buttons for undo or redo. Using Palette can help increase your workflow and is perfect for people who have a tablet in one hand and the controls for most of your processes in another.