

Apple charts the future of the Mac: ditching Intel and an iOS-flavoured macOS

Over the next two years, Apple will phase out Intel-based Macs in favour of its own chips. But what will this mean for creatives – and will it run Photoshop?

Apple has used the first ‘virtual’ version of its WWDC event to announce the biggest change to its line of computers since 2005 – revealing that it will be moving away from Intel-based processors across its Mac range in favour of chips it’s designed itself, dubbed Apple Silicon.

In 2005, Apple announced that it was ditching the PowerPC chips it had created with IBM and Motorola to focus on Intel’s Core processors. Now Apple is moving away to focus on chips designed using the same architecture as used by its iPhone and iPad – but with much higher performance.

The news coincides with the launch of the next version of macOS, Big Sur, which will run on both the new chips and Intel Macs. Big Sur will arrive in the autumn. The first Mac using the new chip – a modified Mac mini – will be available soon, though it’s only for developers Apple.

A screengrab of the livestream showing what Apple's bringing from its iPhone and iPad chip architecture to its own silicon. The reference to high-performance GPUs coming across means that we're unlikely to see discrete GPUs from the likes of AMD or NVidia in future Macs.

The first Mac to be widely available will ship by the end of the year, though we expect that this will be one of the lower-powered laptops such as a new MacBook. As with the move from PowerPC to Intel – it expects the transition to take around two years. Apple will be launching new Intel-based Macs in the meantime, said Craig Federighi, Apple's senior vice president of Software Engineering on a live stream.

Big Sur sees the biggest redesign of macOS since Mac OS X was launched in 2001, according to Apple. It takes many of its design cues from iOS and iPadOS – unsurprising considering its

focus is the same hardware base. Symbol design draws on iOS and iPad OS – you'll even see the return of coloured icons. Apple claims that this reduces visual complexity. Dark mode remains an option.

Features making the move from the iOSes to Mac include Control Centre, Widgets and how notifications are displayed. Also coming across are many iOS and iPad OS apps – these will run natively on Apple Silicon, assuming that they don't depend on functionality that doesn't exist on the Mac, such as a back camera or accelerometer.

Will Photoshop run on Apple's chips?

The biggest question for most creatives will be how the apps they rely on for their jobs will run on the new hardware. Anyone who lived through Apple's move to Intel hardware will remember the pain involved as apps, plugins and other things we'd come to rely on resolutely refused to run properly through Apple's emulation software Rosetta – and even now an OS update can break programs and hardware drives for everyday tools such as Wacom tablets.

At the announcement though, Apple says it's already working with Adobe on creating native versions of its Creative Cloud apps for Apple Silicon – and even briefly demoed versions of Photoshop and Lightroom running on that platform.

The company is also making big claims for its Rosetta 2 emulation engine for running Intel-based apps on Apple Silicon, showing Autodesk Maya running on the platform (*below*). Apple says maximum performance is achieved through 'translating' the app during installation, while 'JIT (just-in-time)' translation is also possible.

Apple also showed Final Cut Pro and Microsoft Office running on macOS Big Sur and Apple Silicon.

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