Best Keyboards for Designers and Artists

For most of us, working on our computer is a daily affair. Whether it’s in your studio, at an agency or office – it’s part of our digital society and it’s important to create a set up that’s right for you. We often take a while to consider our options for laptops, tablets and desktop computers, but probably less so on what keyboard we prefer.

When editing in the Adobe Creative Cloud suite, Final Cut Pro and other software, we learn the best shortcuts and rhythms of our creative process, but what if your keyboard could help you to work even more efficiently, and intuitively?

Here we have a list of best keyboards for designers, including keyboards with customisable dials, specific key lighting and keyboard shortcut covers for individual Adobe applications such as Photoshop and Lightroom. Some of the keyboards have full reviews, so make sure you check those out as well.

For more, check out our list of best laptops for design and art.

Azio Retro Classic

This backlit keyboard offers a classy vintage style. It’s all about the aesthetics. Although it might not be everyone’s cup of tea, and the keyboard weighs a hefty 1.5kg, it’s an impressive, handsome design.

If you’re a fan of tactile, mechanical keys (although they might be a little cold in the winter), and enjoy transporting yourself back a few decades – or you simply want your studio desk to look enviously slick, then this is the keyboard for you.

Azio are known for their sturdy keyboards aimed at gamers and hardcore typists, but its Retro Class keyboard combines modern technology with vintage good looks. This keyboard is all about the detail, such as its circular keys and aluminium plaque. The keys are backlit, with LEDs centred under each key for uniform light across the board. There are four models: Artisan, Psoh, Onxy and Elwood (seen here).

The Azio Retro Classic ships with a Windows layout, but includes Mac equivalents in the box. Simply pop off each PC key and swap them out, toggle a switch on back, and you've got a native Mac keyboard.

Buy: £189/US$189.99 from Azio.

See the full review here.

Logitech Craft



This keyboard is helpful for anyone who uses Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Premiere Pro and Lightroom Classic CC – which is probably most of us. It works with both Mac and Windows for Adobe's tools at least, and it's backlit.

Logitech's new Craft aims to do more for your creativity than your average keyboard. It features a dial at the top left that you can use to control parameters in creative applications – as well as office software like PowerPoint and Word. Logitech calls this dial a Crown, and it works a bit like Microsoft's Surface Dial for the Surface Pro and Surface Studio (read our Surface Studio hands-on review).

In Photoshop, for example, twisting the Crown zooms you in and out. Tap on the top of the dial and parameters for the tool you are using appear – for example, if you're using the Brush

tool you see Size, Hardness, Opacity, and Flow. You can tap from one to another, adjusting each by rotating the dial as you go. Having a physical dial makes adjusting parameters easier than using on-screen sliders with a mouse (or a keyboard), as you can quickly make larger adjustments with a flick of your hand – then slowing your hand's movement down to precisely select the value you want.

However, that the dial is on the left of the keyboard is bound to annoy some left-handed users who like to have their mouse or tablet on the left.

A new update for the Craft has just added support for Lightroom Classic CC; Adobe Reader DC and VLC Media Player on Windows; Preview, QuickTime and Safari; and Spotify for Mac and Windows.

To find out more about what the crown is capable to do, see our full feature.

Buy: The Logitech Craft costs £179.99/US$199.99. You can buy it from Logitech here (UK) or here (US).

Editors Keys Keyboard Covers



Although this keyboard company primarily sells keyboards for sound editing, audio editing and video editing, it’s created handy keyboard covers of Adobe shortcuts for Mac and PC, including for the Microsoft Surface Pro.

Editors Keys has a range of separate keyboard covers with shortcuts specifically for all of Adobe’s Creative Cloud applications, such as Photoshop, InDesign, Lightroom, After Effects, Premiere, Final Cut Pro X and many more.

The good thing about these keyboard covers is the fact they’re affordable, and they prove helpful protection – so your real keys won’t get dusty or suffer from spillages.

Buy: You can take a look at the whole range of keyboard covers here. An Editors Keys Adobe Photoshop Keyboard Cover for

Macbook and iMac cost £27.99/US$39.98.

Corsair Mechanical Gaming Keyboard



There’s no doubt about it – this keyboard is an eyesore. It’s aimed at heavy duty gamers (that goes without saying), but if you’re main priority is functionality over aesthetics, this could be for you.

The interesting feature on these keyboards is the ability to assign each key with its own unique backlighting colour (and intensity) for any function, so you can colour coordinate your shortcuts. This could be helpful if you’re a visual person.

Multicolor key bindings puts you in control, and can speed up your workflow if you’re working to a tight deadline. The Corsair Utility Engine (CUE) software makes it easy to set up sophisticated animated macros and lighting effects.

Change any key on the keyboard to a colour and brightness setting of your choice. You can create, save, and load custom patterns for your favourite shortcuts.

Buy: £189.99/US$189.99 from Corsair.

Apple Magic Keyboard with Numeric Keypad



You can’t go wrong with buying a keyboard made by Apple, for your Apple iMac. Although this keyboard might not strike you as anything special, most Macs come with a shorter keyboard that doesn’t include the numeric keyboard, which actually can be helpful for shortcuts.

And the built-in, rechargeable battery is long-lasting, powering your keyboard for about a month or more between charges.You can choose to power this keyboard with Bluetooth or via a Lightning to USB cable.

Buy: £129/US$129 from Apple.

Another option is to buy the Numeric Keypad separately, rather than buying a whole new keyboard, which leads us into our list of best accessories for designers.

Accessories

Belkin Wireless Numeric Keypad



This keypad works via Bluetooth with both iMac and MacBook. The keypad is designed to match the Apple wireless keypad and has 28 well-spaced keys that are comfortable to use for easy typing. The Bluetooth connection means the keypad is easy and quick to set up. All you need is two AA batteries. It also comes with a handy two-year warranty.

Buy: £49.95/US$49.95 from Apple.

Editors Keys Loupedeck



This device is a photo editing console specifically for Adobe Lightroom (any version above Lightroom 6) and Lightroom Classic CC on both PC and Mac via a standard USB. It also works in conjunction with Editor Keys' Adobe Lightroom keyboard.

Using the Loupedeck, you can control common functions, tools and settings within Adobe Lightroom using its various buttons and dials. Everything is customisable. However, the Loupedeck isn't cheap so make sure you're going to use it.

Buy: £214.99/US$300.98 from Editors Keys.

Palette



If you need more control than a single dial, check out Palette – which is a collection of interconnected dials, buttons and sliders that can work with many of Adobe's applications (as well as Final Cut Pro).

These also work with Macs and Windows PC.

Buy: You can buy individual or multiple palettes in the UK here, or in the US here.

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