Framework’s computers aren’t perfect, but they are exciting

It’s not often that I get too excited about new laptops these days. Modern laptops are extremely capable devices, with few glaring flaws. They are thin, light, and finely tuned to get the job done. Exciting, they are not.

But Framework’s laptops *are* exciting. Under the banner of repairability and sustainability, Framework is making computers that seem to be exactly what enthusiasts have been asking for — for literal decades. Nearly every part of a Framework Laptop can be repaired, replaced, or upgraded by its owner. Want a faster CPU or more RAM? Just swap the board and click in some more RAM sticks, and you’re off to the races. The company is even coming out with a gaming-focused laptop that promises the ability to upgrade its GPU down the line.

And two-plus years into its existence, Framework has already followed through on many of its promises and shown that it is possible to build a modern, svelte laptop that can be fully repaired and upgraded by the end user, something even giants like Dell have been unable to pull off. All of this makes Framework’s computers not only much more sustainable than the average laptop but also, for gadget heads like me, just plain *cool*.

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The excitement I feel about Framework’s products reminds me of

how I felt about the very first laptop I owned, purchased when I was a senior in high school back in the early 2000s. Most of my peers at the time were getting standard ThinkPads and Dells in preparation for college. They were certainly capable computers for the period, but they weren't sleek or unique or anything special and didn't really game well. (Okay, fine, I did have one friend who got a custom Sager gaming laptop that was tricked the hell out because that is the kind of crowd I have always rolled in. Macs were not on our radar.)

But not me. When I was looking for the laptop that would live with me for the next half-decade or more, I wanted something cool, sleek, powerful, and different from everyone else. I wanted it to be portable enough that I could actually take it places, it had to be able to run games like *Unreal Tournament* and *Counter-Strike* (remember, this was the early 2000s), and it had to be comfortable and capable to use for the college classes that I would eventually drop out of.

The computer that met all of my requirements came from an extremely unlikely source: Best Buy's short-lived house brand of computers, VPR Matrix. Just as most people outside of tech nerds have never heard of Framework today, even fewer people were familiar with VPR Matrix back then. But the handful of desktops and laptops that bore the VPR Matrix brand were ahead of their time in all of the right ways. And they were just fucking *cool*. (Yes, from a Best Buy *house brand*. I can hardly believe it myself. By all logical reasoning, this computer should not have existed!)

Let me list all the ways this laptop was cooler than its peers:

- It was the first Windows laptop with a widescreen LCD display back when everything had 4:3 panels.
- It was the first Windows laptop with a slot-loading DVD / CD-RW drive.

- It had a magnesium metal case when every other Windows laptop was plastic as hell.
- It measured less than an inch thick when powerful laptops were routinely twice that.
- It had a discrete Nvidia graphics card that let me bring just my laptop to LAN parties to play games.
- It was designed by F.A. Porsche, long before the Porsche Design name was diluted by countless silly products.

All logical reasoning states this computer should not have existed

A lot of those qualities were similar to Apple's laptops, and yes, the VPR Matrix was effectively a PowerBook G4 but with an Intel Pentium 4, Nvidia GPU, and running Windows. Hell, it even has two four-pin Firewire 1394 ports. On a Windows laptop! (There is, frustratingly, very little information on VPR Matrix computers to be found on the internet, not even a Wikipedia entry, but I did dig up these reviews of it from *PCMag* and *Digital Trends*. I have no idea what "VPR" stands for.)

I had to have this computer. And when Best Buy decided that it didn't want to continue making a house brand of computers that no one heard of and no one was really buying, I was able to snag the last one available in the four stores within driving distance of my home for a hefty discount, spending basically all of my graduation gift money on it. (I recall walking into the store, asking for the laptop I wanted, and having to wait for the Best Buy employee to get the big wheeled stairs so they could dig the last one out of the suspended storage cage above the laptop department. They didn't even have any on display.)

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Needless to say, I was the only person I ever knew to own a VPR Matrix laptop, and I never saw another one in the wild. I used the hell out of that computer, eventually loading various Linux distributions on it many years later. I still have it in my closet, even though it’s not really useful for anything now and has the scars of many years of use (there are dings on the lid, the rubber feet on the bottom are long gone, and a couple of keycaps no longer stay on) because I can’t bring myself to ever get rid of it.

Though the VPR Matrix didn’t have the repairability and upgradability that Framework provides now (I might have upgraded the RAM and hard drive at some point, and I did replace the battery when it stopped holding a charge, but those were things you could do on most laptops of the period), it had the same level of in-the-know factor and was exactly what gadget enthusiasts like me were looking for. It also came with the same sleek silver and black color scheme that Framework appears to be fond of as well.

These days, I’m much less enthusiastic about my laptop. Sure, the MacBook Pro I’m writing this article on works incredibly well — it’s objectively the best laptop I’ve ever owned — but it’s also the same thing everyone else has. I don’t feel like I made a particularly special or unique decision when I bought it — there’s nothing different or novel to really show anyone on it. It’s just a very capable laptop that lets me get my job done.

I can appreciate the excitement generated by Framework’s computers even if I don’t ever buy one

I don’t know if I will ever buy a Framework laptop. Most of my workflows now revolve around macOS, and so far, Framework’s computers have not been as competitive as Apple’s MacBooks in areas such as battery life. It’s hard to justify buying a Framework when the MacBook Air is just so good, though maybe the new models will change that somewhat.

But I still get a little excited and feel the gadget lust welling whenever I read something about a Framework or see someone completely dismantle it in a matter of minutes to upgrade the CPU or other components. The budding community of modders that are taking Framework’s components and building completely new things with them is something I’d love to participate in, even if the reality is I never actually would create any of those things myself.

Even if I don’t ever own one, it’s still fun to be excited about a laptop computer in a way that I haven’t felt in a very long time.

https://www.theverge.com/23664746/framework-laptop-excitement-vpr-matrix-history-nostalgia