Here’s what creatives think of the new Mac Pro



Apple’s new Mac Pro is its most powerful computer ever, with performance specs catered toward creative professionals like visual effects artists, musicians, and filmmakers who need a lot of processing power. Creatives have been asking for a new professional-level computer from Apple since the disappointment of the un-upgradable trash can-looking Mac Pro from 2013, and Apple finally delivered this week with something very pricey and very powerful. But is the new Mac Pro actually what pros have been looking for?

From the modular design that allows flexibility for upgrades to the dedicated Afterburner video editing card that supposedly eliminates the need for proxy workflows, everything about the machine is extreme, including its $5,999 starting price. That alone puts it out of reach for most creators, and that’s before they’ve started to configure it with added power, potentially pushing the price up by tens of thousands of dollars. At that range, artists say the Mac Pro might make more sense as an investment for companies and studios, rather

than something for individuals to put in their home or office.

For 3D and visual effects artists, the fact that it doesn't support Nvidia graphics cards is a major sticking point. Patrick Longstreth, a VFX supervisor on shows like *Adam Ruins Everything* and *Pen15*, says the new Mac Pro is an upgrade from the old trash can model, but it still isn't enough to get him to make the switch from a PC. "I need the best solution for heavy 3D rendering and high-resolution video processing, so for this new Mac to lack support for Nvidia graphics cards is a big disappointment. I can still get better results for half the price with a custom-built PC," he says.

"this is a status symbol kind of purchase."
Apple hasn't sold computers with Nvidia cards in years, and it fully dropped support for them in the latest version of macOS. Instead, Apple has favored AMD's Radeon cards, which are generally known for being cheaper and less powerful than Nvidia's GeForce series. That's limited pros' capabilities, and the lack of Nvidia driver support has left 3D rendering software developers in the dark since their GPU accelerated renderers often only work with Nvidia's CUDA technology.

Onstage at WWDC, Apple showed off committed to supporting the Mac Pro and its graphics API, Metal, which include many of the companies behind 3D rendering applications like Octane and Redshift. These apps, previously built around using Nvidia cards for GPU rendering, will be rewritten to work with AMD. *The Verge*'s senior motion graphics editor, Grayson Blackmon, still remains skeptical. "First versions of software are usually buggy or not as optimized," he says. "What would you rather buy if you need to reliably work on a project? A machine that promises big things, but is essentially running v1.0 software, or something that is cheaper, more powerful, and is tested with a ton of support?"

> *tl;dr: The Mac Pro and display fill a large gap in Apple's professional product line. Prices are reasonable for the*

> *professional user. If you want one at home, you are an idiot.*
>
> *— Michael Pusateri (@Cruftbox) June 3, 2019*

Instead, the Mac Pro may make more sense for studios that can afford to bring in machines that are optimized to fit specific needs, and that's where the reception has been warmer. Brad Watts, a filmmaker and co-founder of Redd Pen Media, a production house, says the Mac Pro has finally given serious professionals who want to stay in the Mac ecosystem a true alternative to PCs. "In my experience, the software is much more optimized and efficient compared to Windows," he says.

With his current setup of two 2013 Mac Pros, Watts finds that the machines can handle most footage, including RAW at 4.6K resolution, but that they struggle with playback as resolutions get higher. That makes the added power of the new Mac Pro appealing. "Even the starting package will be out of reach for many, but I do think serious studios and professionals will be utilizing it especially with the new technology such as Afterburner for playback of 8K," Watts says. "The addition of the PCI slot and now being upgradeable is huge as well."

Mid-sized animation studios or post-production houses could also make use of the new Mac Pro's extensive power. For example, it could be a valuable time-saver for agencies that have to present quick previsualization for clients. "I could imagine them buying one or two to make spec work really fast, but then just renting machines if they got the project and budgeting that cost in," *The Verge*'s art director William Joel tells me. "It's not uncommon to rent render machines for big projects instead of buying. That way, you're built to scale."

> *I think a lot of the perceived demand for a "pro Mac" is really a desire for a "hobbyist Mac," a Mac for people who like tinkering with computers.*

— *Stu Maschwitz (@5tu)* ***June 4, 2019***

VFX director Stu Maschwitz believes Apple ended up delivering a product far higher end than what most people actually wanted. He's counseled against buying Mac Pros since 2015 and says that the only meaningful way a Mac Pro could serve pros would be if it had the ability to use Nvidia cards. Maschwitz believes that the Mac Pro's audience isn't really creatives who need the extreme performance, but hobbyists who've been wanting a computer they can open and customize.

The Mac Pro goes on sale this fall. Pricing for higher configurations hasn't been announced yet, but the potentially ultra high-end prices and lack of support for Nvidia cards could mean that pros continue finding reasons to switch to PCs.

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