The Artist’s and Designer’s Guide to iPadOS

We spent some time with the new iPad OS to discover just what it adds for users of art and design apps – including which iPads and Macs get access to the Wacom Cintiq-like Sidecar.

At WWDC last week, Apple launched a huge range of software and hardware updates – from a much-anticipated big rig of a desktop, the Mac Pro, and a £6k display that can match £35k rivals, to a Pride-linked Watch face and strap. With all of these new products and features aimed audiences from the general public to high-end post-production studios to hardcore developers, it’s easy to miss a series of features aimed at the broader creative community – so we’ve collected them here after seeing a few demos and learning much more than you’d get from Apple’s announcements alone.

Most of these updates can be found in the new iPadOS – a renaming of the iPad flavour of iOS, as Apple believes there’s enough difference between them to justify giving it a completely separate name – though some of them permeate across to the next MacOS too, Catalina.

The most obvious of these is Sidecar, which lets you use an iPad as a second display for your Mac – with the ability to draw on the iPad using the Pencil in many major desktop apps from the likes of Adobe, Affinity and Maxon just like a smaller version of Wacom’s Cintiq tablets (or one of the many Cintiq alternatives).

Using the Sidecar tech across MacOS Catalina and iPadOS, you can connect your Mac and an iPad either via USB or wirelessly – though until we have a chance to test it we can’t tell if wireless connection introduces any lag.

Is Sidecar iPad Pro only?

Our first question is ‘which Macs and iPads will Sidecar support?’. Right now Apple is only confirming that Sidecar will work with the iPad Pro, though it isn’t saying why and isn’t ruling out wider support – more detailed information is expected nearer to iPadOS and MacOS Catalina’s release in the autumn.

MacOS Catalina should run on any Mac released in 2012 or later. Apple hasn’t said which Macs will support Sidecar, though developer Steve Troughton-Smith has discovered that the version of Sidecar in the Catalina beta currently with developers supports only a smaller subset. We don’t know yet if this will be expanded in the final release.

> *Sidecar supports iMac 27″ (Late 2015) or newer, MacBook Pro (2016) or newer, mac Mini (2018), Mac Pro (2019), MacBook Air (2018) , MacBook (Early 2016 or newer), and blacklists all the devices in the screenshot pic.twitter.com/DHNDyI98WV*
>
> *— Steve Troughton-Smith (@stroughtonsmith) June 5, 2019*

As with any second screen, Sidecar lets you either extend or mirror your desktop onto the iPad. The desktop appears with thin ’sidebars’, as Apple calls the strips in a rare moment of rhyming. The side strip gives you a standard set of modifiers – Cmd, Ctrl and Alt – and shortcut keys: copy, paste, undo, etc. Left-handers like me with be pleased to know that this strip can be placed on the right rather than the left if you prefer. The bottom strip replicates what would appear on the Touch Bar, even if you’re using a Mac that doesn’t have one (or are using a closed MacBook Pro with an external keyboard, monitor and mouse, for example).

One time-saving tool for users who won’t have their iPad attached as a screen at all time – ie everybody – is that you

can click on any window on your main desktop and select a ’move to Tablet Display’ option to make it appear on the iPad, ready to be drawn on.

Can you use Sidecar with Photoshop?

Sidecar will technically work with any desktop app, but for the Pencil to work with support for pressure sensitivity and tilt, apps need to support MacOS’s Tablet Events API. Luckily this API is already in MacOS and forms the basis of how other tablet systems – whether Wacom or its rivals or apps that already do what Sidecar offers like Astropad or Duet Display – communicate with your apps.

However, we expect that developers will have to fine-tune their apps to translate the signals from the iPad about how much pressure or tilt the Pencil is putting on the screen into the appropriate results for the app. So currently, this is the list of apps that currently work with Sidecar in the current Mac OS Catalina beta – though we expect to see this grow over time. Photoshop is one of the most obvious apps missing from the list, and we’ve reached out to Adobe to confirm support by the time Catalina and iPad OS ship in the autumn – and will update this story with the company’s response.

- Adobe After Effects, Illustrator, Premiere Pro, Substance Designer & Painter
- Affinity Designer & Affinity Photo
- Apple Final Cut Pro & Motion
- Autodesk Maya
- Blackmagic DaVinci Resolve
- CorelDRAW and Painter
- Maxon Cinema 4D
- Pixologic ZBrush
- Principle
- Sketch

Image: Apple

All of these support pressure and tilt. Some also support multi-touch gestures – so you can pinch-and-zoom with your fingers in Illustrator, but not Substance Designer currently. Developers can also add support for the second-generation Apple Pencil's tappable 'button'.

Apple isn't saying if there will be Sidecar options to allow you to fine-tune your strokes, as you get with Wacom tablets or Astropad – so there may well be a reason you'd want to buy Astropad rather than using Sidecar. Sidecar is unlikely to kill Wacom either: the largest iPad has a 12.9-inch screen, while the Cintiq has models with screens from 13- to 32-inches. The cheapest 12.9-inch iPad is £969/US$999, while you can get Wacom's entry-level, 15-inch Cintiq for nearly half

the price at £529.99/$649.95.

Better web app support

Also new in iPadOS is an improved version of Safari, with what Apple calls ‘desktop-class browsing’. At its simplest, this means that the iPad always identifies itself as a desktop browser so you won’t get stretched mobile sites – but there’s also better support for technologies used by web apps. Apple says that you’ll be able to edit your Google Docs, Squarespace and WordPress sites without needing to use a native app.

iPadOS also debuts mouse support for standard Bluetooth or USB mice. While this is primarily aimed at users with disabilities, it and the new Safari has meant that designer Rafael Conde has managed to get online design tool Figma running on the iPad.

> *Figma is running on iPad with mouse/trackpad support. WHERE IS YOUR GOD NOW? pic.twitter.com/taiFsfTxRf*
>
> *— Rafa (@rafahari) June 5, 2019*

Fonts on the iPad

Proper support for fonts has been one of the major reasons why the iPad hasn’t been able to match laptops for design work. Currently, fonts have to be downloaded and used within individual apps – but can’t be shared across apps.

This changes with iPadOS. Fonts will exist at a system level and you’ll be able to use fonts across all of your apps (assuming they support them). You’ll be able to buy and download fonts from the App Store – and if you’ve got a subscription to a service such as Adobe Fonts (through a Creative Cloud subscription) or Monotype Mosaic, you’ll be able to get these fonts too.

Image: Apple

One app, two windows

One of the most requested features by iPad users over years – especially since Apple introduced Split Screen to show two apps at once – is to show two windows from the same application: whether browser windows when updating your Squarespace site, Procreate drawings with your current artwork and a reference, or just two documents in Pages.

iPadOS adds this. And about bloody time.

Dark mode is great (for some users)

Added in MacOS Mojave, dark mode makes the iPad feel a bit more professional and grown up. It’s now coming to the iPad. Whether you think it’s a good thing or not depends on whether you just get to use it, you’ll have to do additional work to create two visual flavours (light and dark) of the apps you design, or if you can charge clients extra for the additional work.

iPad OS and MacOS Catalina – as well as iOS 13 – will be released in the autumn. This will likely be in September, based on the release of previous OSs.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/creative-software

/artists-designers-guide-ipados/