Wacom Cintiq Pro 24 review

Artist Sam Gilbey gives his verdict on the best drawing screen around – finding a brilliant digital drawing experience marred slightly by touch and driver issues.

Last year I had the opportunity to attend a Wacom event in London showcasing its forthcoming Cintiq Pro 24 and 32, where I had the opportunity to try out the new flagship hardware before release. You can read my further thoughts on the experience, and a partial review here.

While immediately fun to use in the preview environment, it's only when you're able to bring these desk-hogging behemoths into your daily workflow that you can really explore their strengths, and establish what their weaknesses are.

As such, several months later, when the devices actually became available, I'm pleased to say that I've now had an extended period using the Cintiq Pro 24, and the optional Ergo stand, in my own studio. Note that I've only reviewed it as a standalone drawing tablet and screen in conjunction with my Mac, not with the Pro Engine PC module that you attach to the back of the 24-inch or 32-inch models to turn them into full-spec PCs.

Setup was fairly straightforward, with clearly illustrated diagrams to follow. Given the amount of packaging for protection and the size of the Cintiq and stand, it still took a good couple of hours, but I'm notoriously slow at this type of thing. It may well be possible in an hour with careful planning and preparation.

I am currently working with a 5K iMac from 2014, and draw and paint with an Intuos Pro Medium. Once I had assembled the stand, placed the Cintiq on it and got the cables to run neatly through the structure, I was able to connect it up with the DisplayPort to Mini DisplayPort adapter and the USB-C to

USB-C cable, both contained in the box. You also get DisplayPort to DisplayPort and HDMI2.0 to HDMI2.0 cables in the box, as well as a MicroUSB to USB cable (which is for the ExpressKey Remote, something we'll come to shortly).

On my relatively long desk (1.75m), I was able to keep my Intuos Pro Medium tablet in front of my iMac, and have the Cintiq on the right hand side, even having enough additional space to keep my clunky A4 printer and scanner to hand behind the Ergo Stand. This might not have been possible with the truly epic 32" version though, which – budget aside – is probably the main factor to consider before you commit. In any case, within a morning I was unboxed and ready to go, so I went back to work and opened up Photoshop, simply mirroring my displays.

Pro Pen 2

The Cintiq comes with the new Pro Pen 2, which immediately feels great. It's incredibly light but beautifully balanced, and the rubber feels very comfortable to hold for long periods. I also work on an iPad Pro, typically at the beginning of projects for sketching ideas and making a start on portraits and elements of my artwork before I assemble them in Photoshop.

While I enjoy the flexibility and freedom of it, the glossy Apple Pencil simply doesn't feel as good to hold, and the shiny surface of the iPad also isn't as satisfying to draw on. Yes, third-party screen covers are available to mitigate this, but the Cintiq screen is lovely to draw on from the get go, with just the right amount of resistance so it's smooth, yet feels more like paper than glass. Also the nib of the Apple Pencil is quite chunky, whilst the Wacom pen nibs are satisfyingly petite and precise.

YouYou can use the optional Ergo stand to rotate the Cintiq

Pro into a portrait mode.

Wacom Cintiq Pro screen

The colours of the sharp 4K display are bright and beautiful, and if anyone skipped the HD 27QHD version a few years ago for this reason, the extra resolution you'll be getting now makes it worth the wait. Parallax – the gap between the pen and where the drawing appears – has also been greatly reduced since the previous model, to the point of being imperceptible. In short, but crucially, I would say this is the most intuitive and natural way to paint and draw digitally that I've ever experienced.

For anyone like me who spends most of their day drawing and painting (as well as being creative in a broader sense), this is of course the most important factor in terms of whether to purchase this high-end piece of kit or not.

Touch

I have been testing the Touch model. As an iPad Pro user where this aspect is totally seamless and smooth, sadly the Cintiq falls short in this regard. Zooming in and out feels imprecise and jerky, but is just about usable and 'works'. Unfortunately palm rejection doesn't seem to work very consistently, and I found it often misinterprets my palm moving for a desire to zoom out. I couldn't help wonder if it's perhaps telling that Touch can be toggled on and off with an icon on the face of the device.

Occasionally I have tried using a method where if I'm moving around a large piece a lot, I toggle Touch on to move, then off again before I draw, but this is unwieldy and requires conscious effort. Before long I find I have reverted to using Photoshop's move tool and/or the Navigator to find my way around. I don't know if it's possible for the Touch controls

to improve with driver updates, or if my 2014 iMac (with 4 GHz processor and 32GB Memory) is getting a bit long in the tooth, but from my experience I find it hard to recommend going for this significantly more expensive option, with a £500 difference.

However, I've found that the Express Key Remote is far superior in terms of zooming in and out using the touch ring. It's much smoother and responsive, and therefore satisfying to use. It also turns out that the fully-customisable remote is possibly the most important aspect of the whole Cintiq experience. You can assign functions to each button, and have different ones per application also.

You can see it in use in this video of me painting on the Cintiq.

I tried to be disciplined about it, so that whilst working into Photoshop, each time I was tempted to reach for the keyboard, I would then program a new button. This allowed me to quickly build up a set of the controls that I use the most. I gradually refined my system, but what's been interesting is just how quickly you develop the muscle memory. I thought I would need to add small labels to the buttons, but actually it's already very intuitive and I know it'll become seamless over time.

I am continually pressing the Option key when painting to activate the colour picker, but then often using other modifiers, and Shifting between Brush and Move tools. Basically if your app has a keyboard shortcut, you can program that to your remote, and have general controls as well as application-specific ones.

The remote is comfortable to hold in the hand, but also stays firmly in place on the Cintiq, even when tilted, and I tend to leave it on the right hand side, as the generous border around the screen allows. Occasionally I found that the remote, even

when charged and plugged in, just disappears from the Wacom Desktop Center and stops responding. Thankfully either switching the USB port and/or turning the Cintiq off and on again seems to do the trick. A mini keyboard can also be brought up on screen at the touch of a button,

Getting used to the Cintiq certainly takes time. Even a couple of months in, where drawing clearly feels best on it, I find myself going back to my Intuos for a few reasons. First I can't deny the comfort factor. It's how I've worked for years, and whilst initially looking forwards while drawing on the desk below feels strange, once you're used to it, you hand is no longer in the way of your work.

Annoying for us lefties

The most annoying thing I find as a left-handed artist, is that (as far as I can tell) you can't adjust Photoshop's palette scrollbars to be on the left. With the Intuos (or a mouse) this was never a problem, but it's now quite annoying trying to scroll through a gigantic stack of layers looking for a particular thumbnail while your hand is obfuscating it. But that's more Adobe's fault than Wacom's.

The other reason I return to the Intuos from time to time is actually a plus point for the Cintiq, in that I find it to be a more intense experience. My A4 Intuos is significantly smaller, and therefore one makes smaller gestures which are then being scaled up relative to the monitor display. With the Cintiq you're drawing to whatever scale you're looking at on screen, so you're naturally using your arm more, not just the wrist. Drawing on the large screen you also get totally absorbed and time flies.

Of course, you soon build up the stamina for this more strenuous exercise – but don't be surprised if initially you don't work on it all day. Talking of exercise though, I'm also enjoying working standing up from time to time thanks to the

Ergo Stand. Working long hours as I do, and getting more conscious of how unhealthy it is to sit down so much, standing and drawing can be a great way to give yourself a little boost.

One downside of the device is the noise of the fan – whilst not especially loud, you can't help but notice when it kicks in intermittently. You quickly get used to it, and as such it's hardly a reason to put you off getting one, but nevertheless it's still a detail to consider.

Wacom driver problems

It would also be remiss of me not to mention the unfortunate experience I had with the first Cintiq Pro 24 I was sent. I

was prompted by the Wacom Desktop Center to install a firmware update. I did so, only to find that the Cintiq stopped responding entirely.

Technical support were quick to help, and it became apparent that the unit would need to be replaced. A new device arrived a few days later along with labels to send the old one back. Of course I was able to go back to my Intuos in the meantime, so it wasn't hugely disruptive, but it certainly didn't instil confidence. Equally unless Wacom is able to give some insight into what happened, it's hardly fair to guess, but naturally when investing in a piece of kit like this you need it to be reliable, and you want to be assured that installing updates won't break the machine.

Having enjoyed working on the Cintiq so much, this failure was very disappointing in terms of the disruption to my workflow – as I was just getting used to it. However, Wacom were fast to respond and very helpful, and my replacement machine is doing great so far, and hasn't faltered after installing updates. This problem did allow me to make another crucial observation though.

Going back to the Intuos, the tablet I've used comfortably for years, I noticed that it felt slightly less precise and intuitive to draw with. When the new Cintiq arrived, I immediately felt the improvement and an increase in sensitivity, and therefore a sense of relief that I was back working on it again. In short, I didn't want to go back to my old equipment, and over the years reviewing various pieces of drawing technology, that's not often been the case.

Verdict

To sum up, the Cintiq Pro 24 is an amazing screen to draw on. Mark-making feels just right on the surface, and combined with the perfectly balanced Pro Pen 2, you'll never want to return to anything else. Resolution, colour and contrast balance is

massively improved from the previous 27QHD model. However. I still find my 5k iMac has the edge there – particularly in terms of colour range in the shadows – and as such I always check my work there before submitting to clients. Bringing the Cintiq into your workflow will take some time, but once you've programmed your ExpressKey Remote, you'll soon be getting lost in your work and wondering where the time went. It's worth keeping your previous tablet to hand if possible, just in case, or if you're use the keyboard a lot for certain tasks.

I found the Ergo Stand to be an essential component, allowing me to work standing up, or even totally in portrait mode (*below*). I didn't really feel the benefits of the Touch model, and wouldn't go for this option myself given the additional expense. That said, even with some of the minor quibbles, I've decided that I need one of these in my life, as the drawing and overall experience is just too good not to.

To put it another way, I never want that empty space back on my desk ever again.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/reviews/creative-hardware/wacom-cintiq-pro-24-review/