

Omarchy on iMac

Breathing new life into an old computer with Linux

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Sep. 22, 2025



After helping a family member migrate to a new computer, I found myself with an old iMac. The machine from 2017 was very slow running modern macOS, yet I have a soft spot for these all-in-one computers designed by Jony Ive and his team. Could I install Linux on it to give it a second life?

iMac

Probably one of the most important computers that Apple ever built is iMac, the original was critical in Steve Jobs' effort to save Apple from bankruptcy. I like its looks and how its design makes a separate box/tower unnecessary. This saves you a lot of cables that original desktop PC's need (like wires connecting the monitor and speakers).



Migrating to a new iMac

Using macOS's Migration Assistant I helped my family member move his files and apps to a new computer. His old iMac had become very slow running macOS. Newer macOS versions no longer run on this 2017 machine as Apple has dropped support for it. I hate planned obsolescence and offered to find out if I could give this machine a new purpose.

- [Lessons from a takeaway plastic bag: My ever increasing antipathy to planned obsolescence \(Jan. 8, 2018\)](#)

Look, I ain't no saint when it comes to the environment. I have [driven race cars](#) and [flown planes for fun and lunch](#), but I *do* care about throwing good things away for the wrong reasons. In the past I have used my Linux expertise to revitalise old hardware, like in these two earlier posts:

- [Working Offline First: Learning from a 15-year old ThinkPad X200 \(May 1, 2023\)](#)
- [Helping people with free software: Installing Debian GNU/Linux on an old laptop \(July 20, 2018\)](#)

The old iMac is a 21-inch model from 2017 with an Intel i5 processor, 8GB RAM and a 1TB hard disk. Admittedly this machine won't break any speed records, but it looks nice and it runs almost completely silent. Its display has great colours and the glass and aluminium housing offers plenty of space for ports. It has USB-C/Thunderbolt, USB-A, gigabit ethernet, a headphone jack and a SD card reader.

Over the years I have seen my fair share of iMacs and I know that opening them is possible, but not without risk. For sake of simplicity I decided to leave the hardware the way it is, seeking its second life in software instead. Upgrading the memory or installing a SSD may be worth it, you should check out these posts and judge for yourself:

- [Rescuing photos from a crashed iMac: Using advanced tools to read files from a faulty disk \(Oct. 15, 2020\)](#)
- [Upgrading a 27-inch iMac 5K to 14 terabytes: Replacing the Fusion Drive with both a SSD and an harddisk \(July 30, 2020\)](#)

I packed the iMac and took it with me by train. You should have seen the faces on my fellow travellers chimping away at their tiny screens when I sat down with a 21-incher. Dutch trains feature 230V power outlets, but I decided to maintain somewhat of a low profile. Instead I ate an apple while the other Apple was tucked away in a bag.



Waiting on the platform for my train with an Apple in a bag...



... while eating an apple!

Omarchy Linux

Back home I booted the iMac to see if it survived the adventure in the train and I proceeded with downloading [Omarchy](#) onto a USB-drive. Based on [Arch Linux](#), David Heinemeier Hansson, or [DHH](#), created Omarchy to be a beautiful, modern distribution of Linux. Unique to Omarchy is the overall vibe of [Omakase](#), Japanese for "Chef's Choice". This means that a great deal of effort (and taste) has already been poured into the system so you don't need to figure out everything yourself. It is opinionated and you may not like all the defaults, but it is pretty good from the get go and its installation process is *very* fast and requires very little manual input.



Using balena Etcher to create a bootable USB-drive to install Omarchy



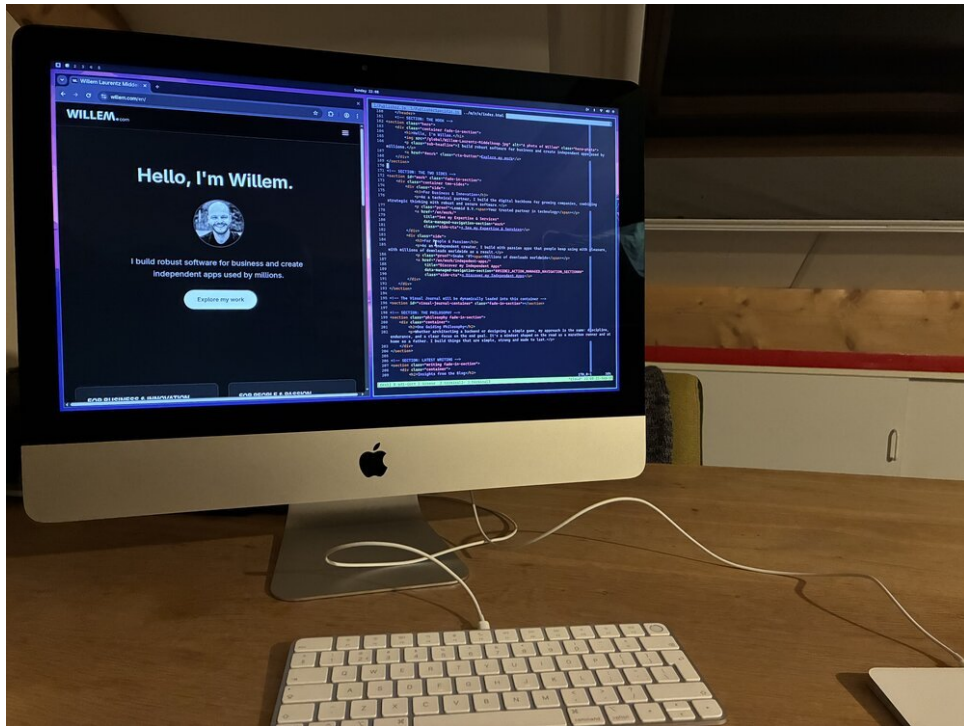
Don't be fooled by the tongue-in-cheek retro logo: Omarchy is a cutting edge flavour of Linux with all the modern tools you need

[manual](#) to learn more. If you prefer watching videos you could check out [DHH's YouTube channel](#) where he demo's many features of Omarchy.



Omarchy reporting for duty after first boot: The Tokio Night theme looking great as default

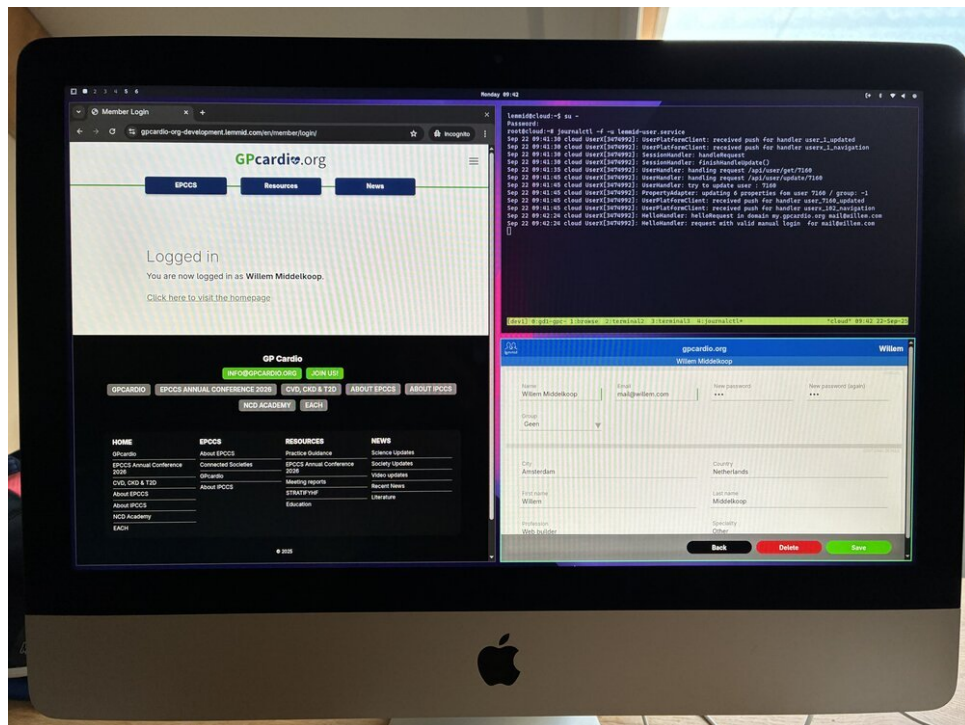
I was immediately surprised by the lack of latency. Everything feels uncanny fast. Maybe it is because of the [Hyprland](#) window manager or maybe it is the wired keyboard connection. I don't know, but Omarchy feels fast, really. It blew my mind that if this old machine can feel so great, then what the hell are my modern machines doing with all their power!?



Before I knew it, I was using Omarchy to do some work. It is powerful right out of the proverbial box

Experimenting and Learning

For the simple reason of it being fun to use, I intend to continue using my Omarchy iMac to do my work as web app developer. One thing I love is how web apps are treated as first class citizens, running and looking just as good as any other app. For my work this is really great as it elevates my own tools like [Lemmid](#), without requiring me to do crazy things like [creating native wrappers](#)...



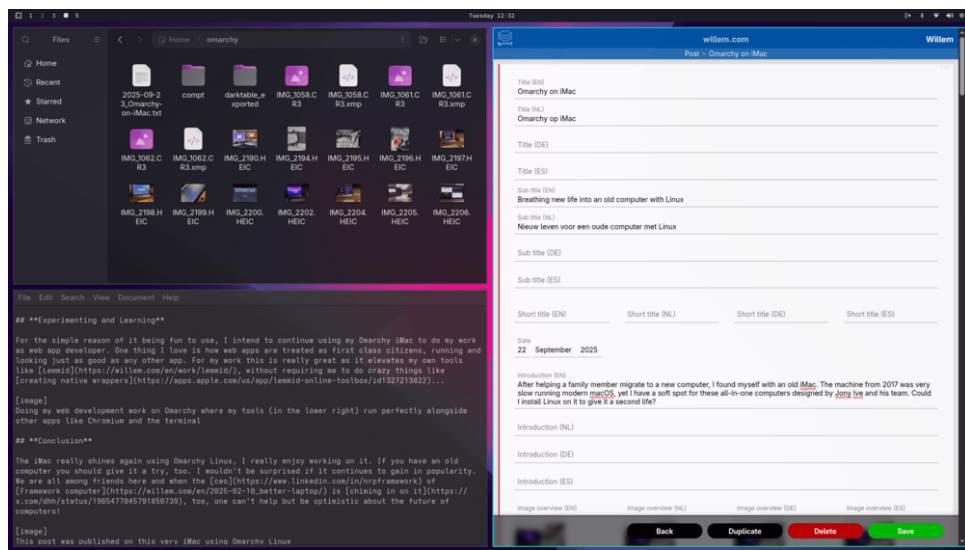
Doing my web development work on Omarchy where my tools (in the lower right) run perfectly alongside other apps like Chromium and the terminal

Conclusion

The iMac really shines again using Omarchy Linux, I really enjoy working on it. If you have an old computer you should give it a try, too. I wouldn't be surprised if it continues to gain in popularity. We are all among friends here and when the [ceo of Framework computer](#) is [chiming in on it](#), too, one can't help but be optimistic about the future of computers!



This post was published on this very iMac using Omarchy Linux



On the screenshot: Nautilus file explorer, Mousepad text editor and the Lemmid content management system running together on Omarchy