

Omarchy on iMac

Breathing new life in old computer with Linux

22 September 2025

- After migrating some family member's iMac found myself with an old 21-inch iMac from 2017 with intel i5, 8GB ram, 1TB HDD. MacOS ran -very- slow
- Took it with me by train
- ate an Apple
- Downloaded Omarchy ISO onto USBstick
- Installed Omarchy (in 6 minutes!)
- before I knew it, I was editing code.
- Learn about something new, different and great repurpose for older computer

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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 obsolete. This saves you a lot of cables that original desktop PC need (like wires connecting the monitor and speakers).

[image]

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.

[post 2018-01-08] takeaway bag

Look, I ain't no saint when it comes to the environment. I have driven race-cars [green hell] and flown planes for fun and lunch [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:

[post 2023-05-01] 15 year old X200

[post 2018-07-20] free software old comp.

The old iMac is a 21-inch model from 2017 with an intel i5 processor, 8GB RAM

and a 1TB harddisk. 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 an SSD may be worth it, you should check out these post and judge for yourself:

[post 2020-07-30] upgrading iMac

[post 2020-10-15] rescuing photos

I packed the iMac and took it with me by train. You should have seen

the faces of my fellow travellers chiming away at their tiny screens when I sat down with an 21-incher. Dutch trains feature 230V power outlets, but I decided to maintain some low profile. Instead I ate an apple while the other Apple was dodged away in a bag

[image]

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

[image]

... 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 [link] onto a USB-drive. Based on Arch Linux, David Heine Meier Hansson, or DHH, created Omarchy to be a beautiful, modern distribution of Linux. Unique to Omarchy

is the overall vibe of Omakase, Japan for "chef's choice". This means that a great deal of effort (and taste) has already been poured into the configuration and looks of 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.

[image]

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

[image]

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

[image]

The installer does its magic almost completely automatically

[image]

The Omarchy installer is fast, the entire operating system with all the pre-selected looks and tools only took 6m 19s on the old iMac from 2017 to complete.

After installation you really are ready to go, the machine booted and greeted me with the beautiful desktop from the default Tobio Night theme, similar in colours to the original OSX Leopard desktop wallpaper.

You should check out the official [website](#) and manual [\[link\]](#) to learn more. If you prefer watching videos you could check out DHH's Youtube channel where he demos many features of Omarchy.

[image]

Omarchy reporting for duty: The Tobio Night theme looking great as default

I was immediately surprised by the lack of latency. Everything feels uncanny fast. Maybe it is the Hyprland window manager or maybe it is the wired keyboard connection. Omarchy is fast, really. It blew my mind that if this old machine can feel so great, then what the hell are my other modern more powerful machines doing with their power?

[image]

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 tools like lemmid [link].

[image]

Doing my web development work on Omarchy where my tools (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 popularity. We are all among friends here and when the ceo of framework computer is chiming in on it's too, one can't help but be optimistic on the future of computers!

[image]

this post was published on this very iMac using Omarchy linux