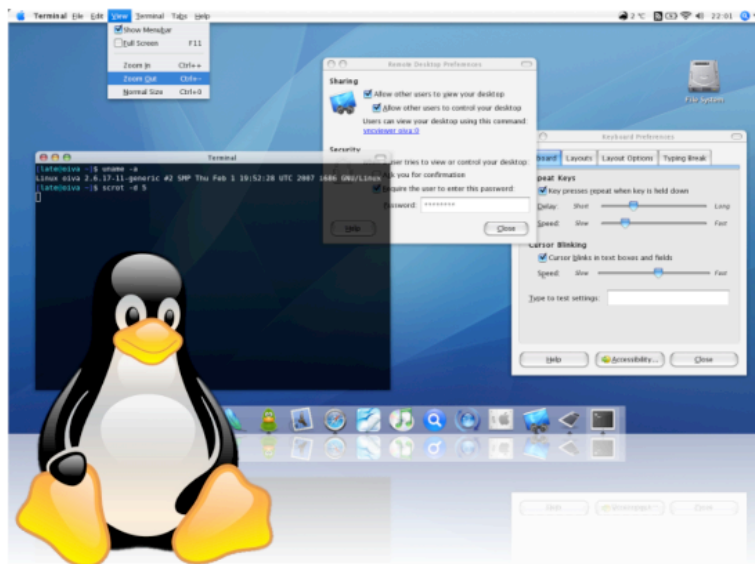Home

Linux desktop imitating OSX

This is my second article about how to modify your Gnome Linux Desktop to look like OSX desktop. My first article is one year old and since that, there has been many changes in both, my knowledge and availability of the software and themes. This article is not written in such a detail than the first one. Remember that you can always take a look at the old article too. And I have also written Orange-look guide for Ubuntu which contains some good tips. This article answers better to question WHAT than HOW. What do I need if I want to imitate OSX? And not so much "how can I change my wallpaper" stuff.

**Original design of the user interface that is
imitated here was created by Apple inc.**

you can discuss about this article and OSX-modifying in general at Ubuntuforums in this thread. There is also a discusson thread in Finnish.

I decided to write another guide, because my first guide became surprisingly popular. There are about 1000 unique visitors per day on my site and 26000 unique users per month. That is a lot more than I suspected and ever hoped. Thank you all!
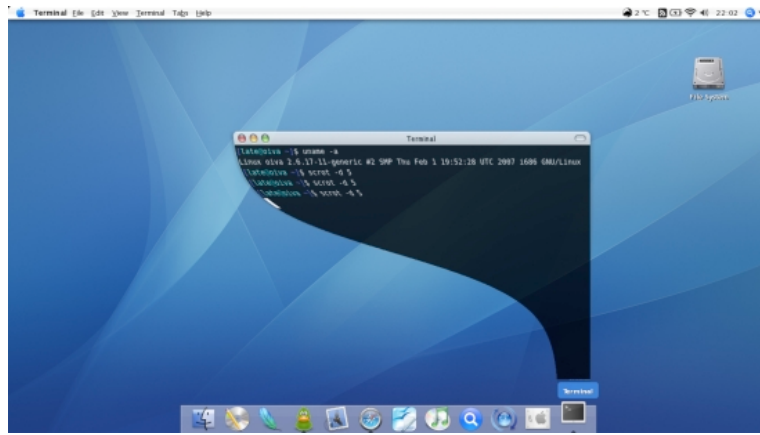
Why I wrote this article?

Ok, there are almost always misunderstandings when people modify their OS to look some other OS. This is NOT about "I want a mac" or "I want OSX". If I would want a mac, I would go and buy one of those. No, this is simply about having fun by imitating and finding the limits of Gnome desktop. I often read that Gnome is considered very plain and not very configurable. I can't agree with that. Gnome is usable and simple, but yet very powerfull and it is possible to modify Gnome into anything you want. Now, I challenge KDE and OSX users to do the same. Can you make your KDE to look OSX as well as Gnome can imitate it? Or can you change your OSX to look Gnome, KDE or Windows? I doubt it, but I love to be proved wrong! ;)

Just to be clear, **I don't want that OSX-look would be the default look of the Gnome.** Gnome is beautiful with Tango icons and it should continue to follow it's own clean and usable style. I'm glad I made that clear. :) Now, let's begin...

Desktop Effects

OSX has some nice desktop effects like expose and magic lamp. Those not only make your desktop look good, but also improve usability. Of course, not all effets are good for usability and that's why Linux gives you a choice of which effects to use. Recently Compiz and Beryl were merged back to one project that is called *Compiz Fusion*. Compiz Fusion is a program that creates those amazing effects.

Screenshot illustrating "magic lamp" effect when window is minimized to the dock.

I won't discuss installing and configuring Compiz Fusion in this article for two reasons. First, there are dozens of HOWTO-guides, which tell you how to do that. Second, it depends a lot of which graphics card you have, which distro you use etc. So, I recommend that you take a look of OpenCompositing forums for more information.
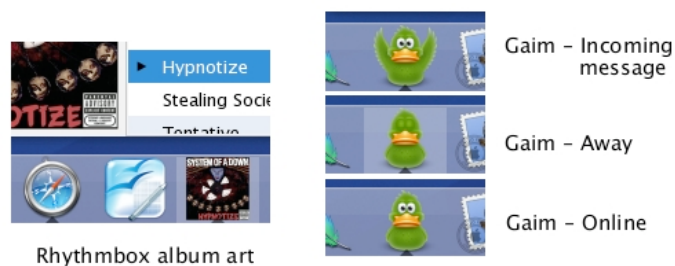
Basic elements of the OSX desktop

OSX has a desktop with icons as almost all desktop environments has. What gives OSX it's unique look is *a dock* that works as application launcher and taskmanager at the same time. Another element is an application menubar that is located on the top of the screen. This bar displays current application's menu and some system tray icons, clock etc. This differs from all the other desktop environments as fas as I know.

Emulating OSX Dock
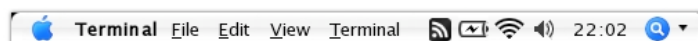

Screenshot of Avant-window-navigator emulating OSX-dock.

There are many open source projects that aims to offer OSX-dock style dock for Linux desktop. There are KXDocker, Avant-window-navigator, kiba-dock and Gnome-dock (which is actually a techology demo). My favourites are Neil J. Patel's Avant-window-navigator and Gnome-dock that was written by MacSlow. In the screenshot above you can see Avant-window-navigator that is my current choice. It can be easily modified to look like OSX-dock and it works as application laucher AND taskbar. There are also nice plugins for it that allows applications to change icon on dock. This allows Gaim to use status icons on bar and Rhythmbox to display alubm art as icon.

Screenshot of Avant-window-navigator emulating OSX-dock.

Emulating OSX menubar

OSX has only one menubar on the screen at the time. This menubar is displayed at the top of the screen with clock and system tray icons. Gnome doesn't have this kind of bar at default, but it is possible to make one. What you need is gnome-panel that is 24 pixels high. Use OSX-like background image for your panel. You can download it below. Just select the one that is correct to your resolution. If there is not version available for your resolution, it's not difficult to create one with GIMP.

Screenshot of Gnome-panel that is modified to look like OSX menubar

Background for 800x600

Background for 1024x768

Background for 1280x1024
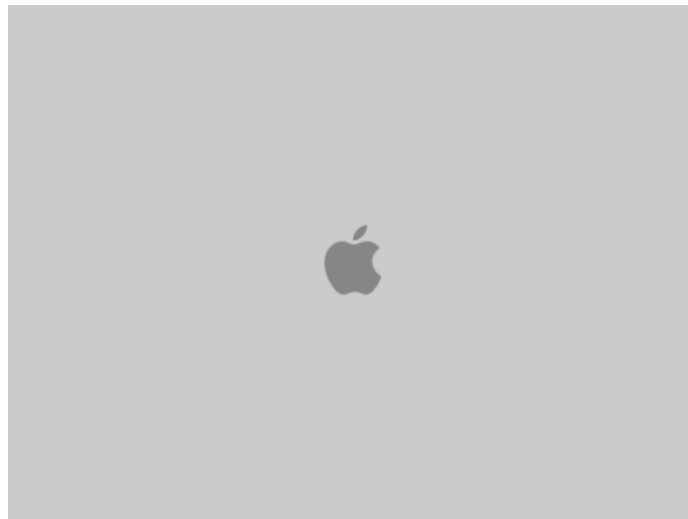
Background for 1366x768

Background for 1440x900

Now that we have a panel with nice and shiny look, it's time to add some gnome-applets to it. To imitate OSX I recommend you to use clock applet, notification-area applet, deskbar-applet, macmenu-applet and some menu-applet to add that apple logo. Deskbar is a user interface for Tracker and Beagle that you can use for desktop search. Macmenu-applet is the trickiest one here. Gnome doesn't support this kind of behaviour for default so you'll need to patch GTK-librarys with some code that AqD provided to the community. You can read more about macmenu-applet and patches at Ubuntuforums. System tray icons are based on the current icon theme. So the correct way to change them is to change the icon-theme.

There is deb-packages for Ubuntu Feisty users available at Ubuntuforums. Just see this post. There is a download link and installation instructions. These packages improve AqD's patches even more. For example, underscores '_' are removed from menuitems.

Boot screen

I couldn't find a decent OSX-look-a-like bootpslash theme for Linux. So again, I did it myself. This is the great thing with the Linux. You can always do things by your self if it's not provided already. I created an usplash theme that tries to imitate OSX boot screen. There is one difference though. In real OSX boot screen there is a nice round animation and in my theme there is a progress bar. Maybe in the future I'll learn how to make that animation to Linux boot screen. I think that it's possible to do it with usplash.

I'm not a usplash theme guru yet, so this theme is not perfect. Especially it doesn't support widescreen resolutions. If you have 4:3 resolution monitor then everything is ok. If you have widescreen resolution then there will be black bars on both sides of the bootimage. If you know how to fix this, please contact me. Below is a screenshot of my current usplash theme, which you can download from here.
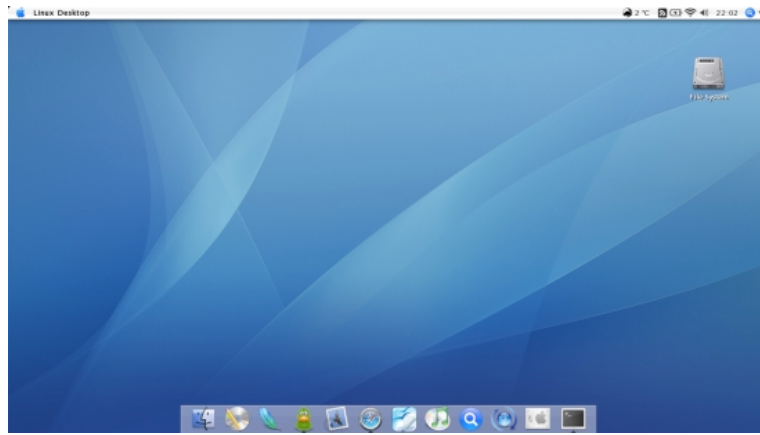

Screenshot of my usplash theme. This image is lacking the progress bar.

Wallpaper and desktop icons

Wallpaper isn't really a part of OSX, because everyone can change that. It still creates a nice illusion if you use the wallpaper that is used to see on other OS. That's why, if you want real OSX-look then you should also use OSX-wallpaper. Get the wallpaper from here.
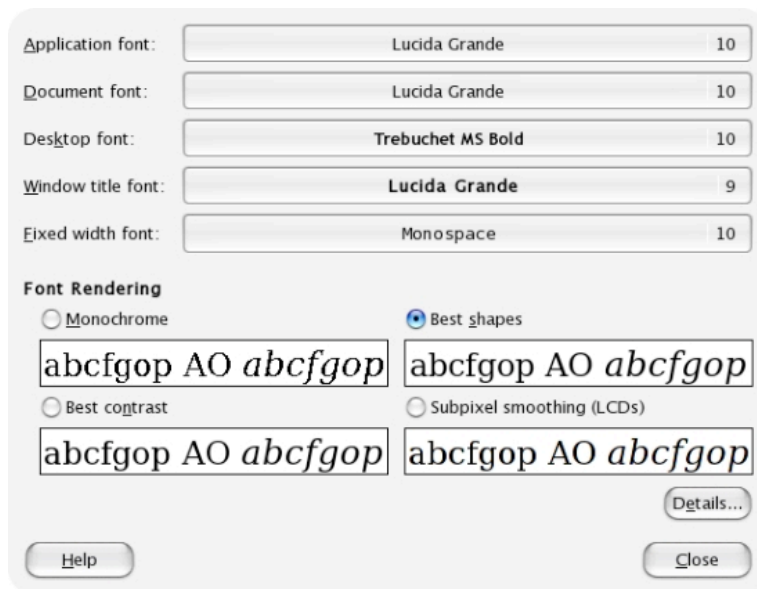
Well, I don't have much to say about desktop icons. There are only few and there is nothing special about them. Just create desktop icons as you have used to.

Screenshot of clean Gnome desktop that is modified to look like OSX.

Fonts

OSX uses Lucida Grande font. You can download this and other mac fonts from here. Below is a screenshot of my font settings. I also recommend you to add this fonts.conf file under your home directory. Rename file to **.fonts.conf**.It improves font rendering after X has been restarted.

My font settings on Gnome.

Login screen

Gnome uses GDM as a graphical login screen. There are many nice OSX-looking themes available, but none of them was good enough for me. So I took the best one and modified it a little bit. Only a little, but it's all about details. ;) You can download GDM-theme from here. It's not perfect, but I really don't care. It's about 5 seconds on my screen and that's it. This theme is based on AppleLinux theme.
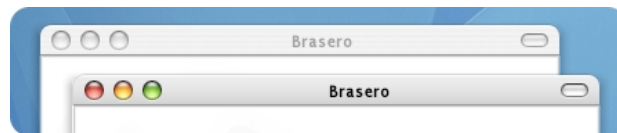
Screenshot of GDM-theme.

System themes

I didn't find GTK-theme that would imitate OSX as well as GTK allows. That's why I decided to create my own theme that I based on Glossy P theme, which was a good starting point. I used some of the graphics directly from Glossy P and some I did by myself. It's not a prefect copy of OSX, because there are some limitations in GTK that I can't get around. You can download my GTK-theme from here.

At the moment I use Beryl compositing and it's emerald window manager. There is a great OSX Tiger theme for emerald which you can download from here.

Application specific themes

Unfortunately, not all GTK-applications uses icon-theme icons. For example Gaim, Terminal Server Client and Liferea has their own icons, which cannot be affected by changing the global icon-theme. Also Firefox and Thunderbird has themes that are out of the scope of global Gnome themeing. I don't have time and energy to write guide to all of those programs, but you should read my two previous articles, which discuss this in more detail. Here I will just offer few links and that's it.

    iFox theme for Firefox
    Apple Mail theme for Thunderbird
    OSX-theme for Gconf-editor
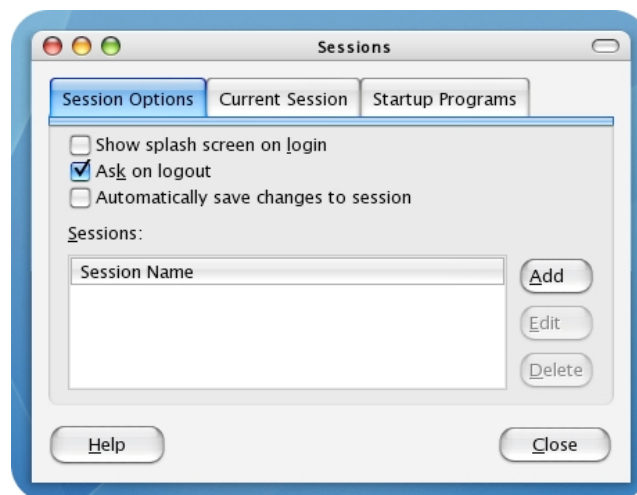   OSX-theme for Liferea RSS-reader

Icons

Icons are essetial part of the desktop design. OSX has nice glossy icons and Gnome has... well... gnome has icons. I'm glad to see that Gnome started to use Tango style icons which is a huge improvment, but those doesn't really fit to OSX look that we are trying to imitate here. I have created a nice and full covering icon-theme for Gnome that uses real OSX icons and other cool icons made by talented people. Only the problem is, that I don't have copyrights and I'm uncertain can I release them here without gettig problems to myself.

I advice you to create your own theme by collecting OSX-style icons from the internet. There are plenty of icons available for example at DeviantArt.

gaim.png gconf-editor.png gdebi.png gdesklets.png

gdict.png gdm-setup.png gdm-xnest.png gdm.png

gedit.png gftp.png gimp.png gimp2_0.png

gksu-icon.png gksu-root-
terminal.png gksu.png glade-2.png

gnome-app-
install.png gnome-
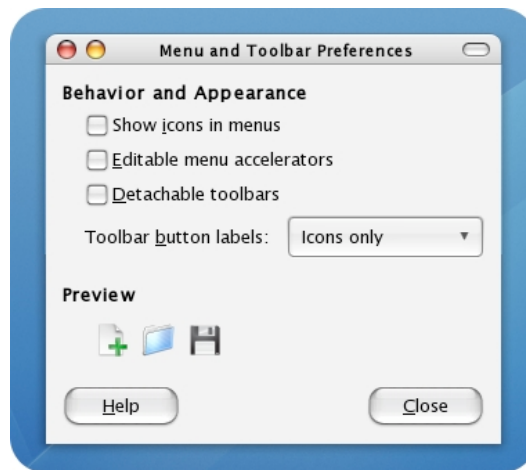calculator.png gnome-cd.png gnome-control-
center.png

Polishing user interface

It's all about details. Espesially when you are trying to imitate something or someone. So here are some final tips that I recommend you to do. First remove that gnome-splash screen. There is no use for that and it's not very elegant. Below is a screenshot where "Show splash screen on login" is unchecked. Do the same. **Notice that in latest Gnome this has to be done with gconf-editor since it's not an option in session window anymore**.

Another thing that I did is that I removed icons from menus. This gives a cleaner look, but it also might make your desktop less usable. At least in Gimp those icons are very handy. Anyway, here is a screenshot of my menu & toolbar settings.

All in all, keep things simple! Do not add dozens of icons to your desktop. :)

Add new comment

Comments

Changing the background of the mac Menu Bar

23. July 2007 - 8:03 — Francis (not verified)

I love the mac interface and I love the flexibility that GNU+Linux has to offer . Following your tutorial I have my laptop looking like a mac . Though i am using another GTk Theme that makes my controls look slightly different (it uses Gray insted of blue). My mac Menu Bar is stuck on grey and I noticed that you have a way of making it blend into the background of the panel. Could you please tell us how this can be archived by editing the gtkrc .
Thanks once again for the Lovely tutorial , I now have the best of both worlds !!

reply

Panel and menu

23. July 2007 - 8:40 — Lauri Taimila

I believe that the trick is to use the same background image for panel and menubar. I really can't remember how I did this, but you should download my theme and check out gtkrc and panel.rc. Those files contains all the needed information. So your theme should set a background image for panel and you should also set the image for your self as guided in this tutorial. The background image in the theme doesn't have rounded corners, but it is needed to have a consistent panel. You can copy panel-bg.png from my theme to your theme and modify gtkrc to use it.

reply

Almost There : : Changing the background of the mac Menu Bar

23. July 2007 - 12:47 — Francis (not verified)

I managed to get the background over one part (which displays the name of the application currently in focus) of the mac Menu Bar by adding the following to my theme's gtkrc from yours >>
style "panelbg"
{
xthickness = 0
ythickness = 0
bg_pixmap[NORMAL] = "Panel/panel-bg.png"
#bg_pixmap[SELECTED] = "Panel/panel-bg.png"
#bg_pixmap[INSENSITIVE] = "Panel/panel-bg.png"
#bg_pixmap[PRELIGHT] = "Panel/panel-bg.png"
}
class "*Panel*" style "panelbg"
class "*notif*" style "panelbg"
class "*Notif*" style "panelbg"
class "*Tray*" style "panelbg"
class "*tray*" style "panelbg"

Though the space where the actual menu items are listed is still a blob of gray colour without any background. I am missing some styling .
Any recommendations ????

reply

Thanks

Thanks for this guide and your other ones as well. :)
However if I want to install the Gconf theme, the thememanager tells me that it is an invalid format. Do you have any suggestions?

reply

Gconf icons

You can't install Gconf icons with the Gnome theme manager. You need to extract the package and copy the icons to /usr/share/pixmaps/gconf-editor. This action requires root privileges. Be aware that this overwrites original icons. So there is no way to uninstall it. Of course you can backup original icons before you overwrite them.

reply

menu

for some odd reason menu background didn't turn up polished as expected. i am using ubuntu 7.04

Erica

reply

Great Work

Hi. I want to thank you for the great article. I am also having difficulty providing a background to my macmenu-applet.

reply

awn issues

I'm having issues with Avant-window-navigator... I can't add launchers. I was wondering if you had encountered anything similar, or if its a problem unique to me, and how it might be resolved.

reply

Avant Window Navigator

I haven't had any problems with awn. I just dragged and dropped items from my menu to awn dock. You should ask this question at this blog. He knows better, because he has written the this dock application.

reply

Another Firefox theme

I suggest you another Firefox theme:

https://addons.mozilla.org/firefox/addon/3430

Clean, professional and elegant.

Also I recommend this icon set:

http://www.gnome-look.org/content/show.php/OsX_MoD?content=54851&PHPSESS...

And a Leopard theme based on your gtk theme:

http://gnomestyle.blogspot.com/2007/06/leopard-macmenubar-version.html

reply

Apple look-a-like

Great article this. I just want to say thanx for pointing me to the Avant Dock. Just upgraded to Gutsy Gibbon Ubuntu Alpha3, and AWM was in the package list, and toghether with compiz-fusion it works like a dream. EyeCandy Supreme. Also kudos for your site, like the design.

reply

Good work!

27. July 2007 - 23:57 — gexking (not verified)

Good work!!!
ITALIANI!!
Per chi non se la cava molto bene sia con l'inglese che con ubuntu ho fatto una quida qui:

http://hackheads.blogspot.com/2007/07/ubuntu-osx-stile-mac-osx.html

Lauri Taimila: Ok, only english please. This seems to be a link to another guide.

reply

Nice and interesting one.

31. July 2007 - 10:00 — BilboBaggins (not verified)

That's a great article!
I'll be back here as soon as I force myself to install Linux on my MacBook :).
BTW. Have you seen this:
http://www.etoile-project.org/etoile/mediawiki/index.php?title=Main_Page

Cheers and thanks for this guide :).

reply

Nice tutorial here ! Just a

1. August 2007 - 21:20 — Anonymous (not verified)

Nice tutorial here ! Just a suggestion : If you want have a "leopard-dock-effect"
Like this : http://doc.ubuntu-fr.org/_detail/awn-reflexion2.png?id=avant-window-navi...

Launch Gconf-editor go to apps/avant window navigator/bar and change this :

bar_angle : 45
icon_offset : 18

reply

Great work!

3. August 2007 - 2:32 — Tavo (not verified)

You've done great!, I just wonder two things... Is it possible to make panel's tabs centered? And what about the "moving-bubble-effect" that exists when you move a scrollbar in OSX?

reply

Scrollbar and tabs

3. August 2007 - 12:44 — Lauri Taimila

I'm not 100% sure would it be possible to get tabs centered by writing a new GTK-engine. Anyway, even if it's possible it's too much work. As far as I know GTK doesn't support animated widgets so the scroll bar cannot be animated.

reply

---

feisty fawn

3. August 2007 - 14:33 — Anonymous (not verified)

Is this tutorial full compactible with feisty fawn 7.04 ?

reply

Compatibility

3. August 2007 - 15:38 — Lauri Taimila

Yes, the guide is mostly distribution independent. Only thing that might raise problems is GTK-patch for mac style menubar. If you compile it yourself then there is no problem. There are also some deb packages available, but I'm not the author of those packages. So I don't know if they work also in Feisty.

reply

On the Macmenu applet I get

4. August 2007 - 6:50 — Steven Presley (not verified)

On the Macmenu applet I get an ugly gray bar after the title of the program. I noticed you dont have this, how can i fix it? Could it be because i had not compiled it from source? There are .deb packages in the macmenu thread for ubuntu 7.04 (which i am running) that i used to install the applet. Should i uninstall it and compile from source?

reply

Same thing here, the macmenu

22. August 2007 - 3:08 — seba (not verified)

Same thing here, the macmenu applet and others gnome applets shows the theme background instead the panel background. It seems that the osx theme override the panel background, any news?

cheers

reply

Same here, ugly gray bar from system theme

29. September 2007 - 2:36 — Anonymous (not verified)

I have the exact same problem. Maybe alter the system theme? Or, that would mess up everything else. Ive got everything but the macmenu working. :-(

reply

Well done

6. August 2007 - 10:57 — Dave Wegner (not verified)

Great How-To!! Appreciate the links to various images and other content.

I have looked all over the AWN project page as well as the AWN-Plugins page on Google code but have not found the Rhythmbox plugin you mentioned. Where might it be?

Thanks!

reply

AWN + Rhythmbox

6. August 2007 - 14:47 — Lauri Taimila

Check out Avant Window Navigator's forum. There is a thread about it.

reply

everytime i try to install

6. August 2007 - 22:59 — Anonymous (not verified)

everytime i try to install any program in the terminal i always get this message
guttershark@comp:~/downloads/avant-window-navigator-0.1.1$ ./configure
checking for a BSD-compatible install... /usr/bin/install -c
checking whether build environment is sane... yes
checking for gawk... no
checking for mawk... mawk
checking whether make sets $(MAKE)... yes
checking how to create a ustar tar archive... gnutar
checking whether to enable maintainer-specific portions of Makefiles... no
checking for style of include used by make... GNU
checking for gcc... gcc
checking for C compiler default output file name... configure: error: C compiler cannot create executables
See `config.log' for more details.

any help on this??? thanks

reply

Riight

12. August 2007 - 19:38 — Anonymous (not verified)

So all you've really done here is throw a bunch of program names around that were used or could be used. This isn't a tutorial, it is more like you just talking about how to do this and not actually showing how. You list off programs that can be used but neglect to mention which one should be used, should they all be used in unison with each other or should the user just choose on that is best for them.

You only speak of Compiz Fusion, perhaps mention whether or not Compiz or Beryl will also work. As far as tutorials go, this is terrible but as far as a place to gather some information it is decent.

reply

Reply to Riight

12. August 2007 - 22:46 — Lauri Taimila

Thank you for your comment. Yes, that is pretty much what I've done here. I have also created Tiger GTK-theme which can be downloaded from here or gnome-look.org. My first guide (currently offline) was written in very detail and it was more "noob friendly".

Certainly, this article is not for those who has just installed their first Linux distribution, but for those who already know Linux, but doesn't necessarily know that there are all this apps available, which allows Linux desktop to imitate OSX.

Why I wrote this article without details? Well, most of the details were in the first one (which again, is offline at the moment. Sorry). Secondly, it would take a LOT of time to write detail instructions for each mod and app. When it comes to Compiz and Beryl, I consider those two projects obsolete since they were merged to Compiz Fusion. I wouldn't recommend Beryl or Compiz (old) to anyone. Compiz Fusion is the project that is developed in the future. As far as I know, Beryl and Compiz (old) will not be continued as separate projects. So there is no point to bring them up here.

I hope you got something from this article even though it's not written in detail. You should consider this text as a guideline to **"what you need to do"** and not **"how to do it"**. This is a quote from the beginning of the article: *"This article answers better to question WHAT than HOW. What do I need if I want to imitate OSX? And not so much "how can I change my wallpaper" stuff."*

reply

Well

17. August 2007 - 16:19 — Anonymous (not verified)

I'm no noob to linux, I did get the everything working without using compiz fusion. I'm using Beryl, Gnome-dock, and a Beryl theme to imitate the OSX borders. Beryl and Compiz by themselves are not obsolete and still work very well with what your trying to do. I would note that on this page.

My points were less of an issue for me but for someone who might take a look at this and start thinking "WTF, how do I do that?"

reply

Reply

18. August 2007 - 13:42 — Lauri Taimila

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to suggest that you are a noob. I was speaking in general. You are right that Beryl and Compiz would do the job at the moment, but I still wouldn't recommend them any more. But if people read these comments they will see that it's an option.

reply

Icons/Starters

21. August 2007 - 13:53 — Anonymous (not verified)

Hello
Everything is working except one thing: After a reboot, all the icons/starters from the bar are missing and i need to add them again....What can i do to avoid this? awn starts automatically, also beryl

reply

Reply

22. August 2007 - 14:14 — Lauri Taimila

This sounds weird. I'm afraid that I can't help you with this.

reply

1 2 3 next › last »