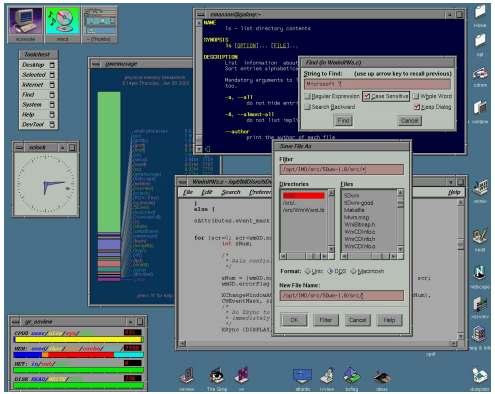
Desktop Environments, Window Managers and Ricing (Oh My!)

- Featuring AwesomeWM and Hyprland

What is a Desktop Environment?

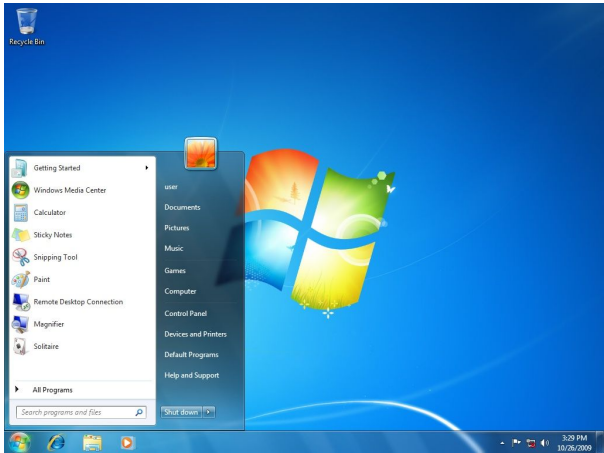
- A desktop environment (DE) is an extensive GUI that allows to intuitively interact with their operating system and the various applications and tools currently installed.
- They are composed of a multitude of individual components such as a window manager, file manager, taskbars, panels and widgets that provide streamlined access to various features of your system.
- The design of a desktop environment is often derived from the idea of it being an actual desktop, with windows resting on top of eachother like papers and having all of your utilities at an arm's reach.



(4Dwm environment from the Silicon Graphics workstations running IRIX.)

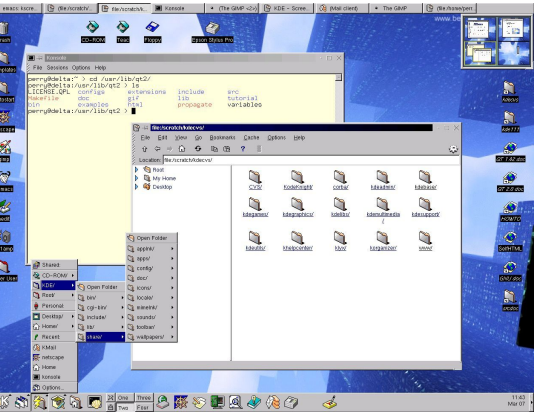
Examples: Windows Shell

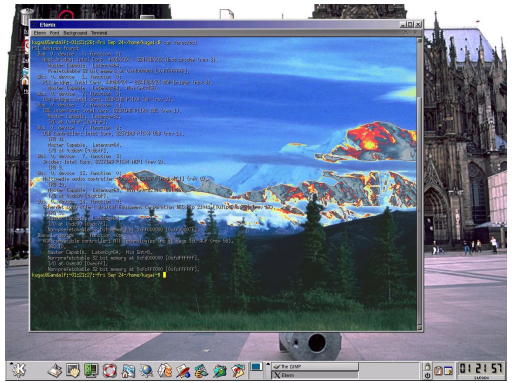
- Windows Shell is the most ubiquitous example of a DE, and its layout and workflow have evolved and changed with Windows itself ever science the DE's inception in 1995 with the release of Windows 95, which included the now iconic Start menu, taskbar and Windows Explorer.
- Often synonymous with the PC experience for many users due to its market dominance regarding the personal computer.
- Many alternative Linux DE's are similar to Windows Shell's design philosophies, such as KDE Plasma's implementation of a familiar start menu and taskbar.

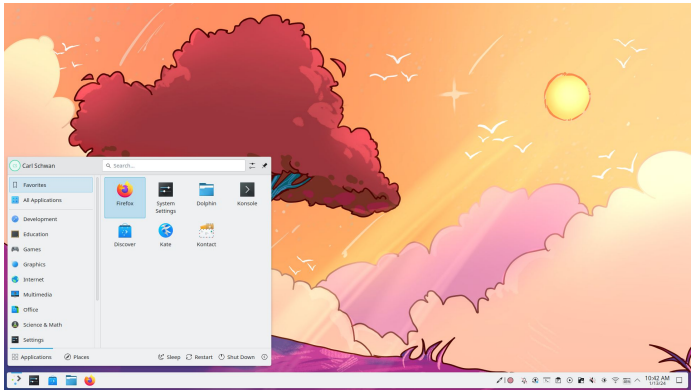


Examples: KDE

- Established in 1998 as KDE 1.0, built on the Qt framework, provided a full and complete desktop environment with all the bells and whistles you could need in a DE at the time (Window manager, file manager and system tray along with various widgets).
- Known for its modularity and respect to user freedom and customization.
- A modern implementation, known as KDE Plasma, is the DE that the Steam Deck uses.
- Originally known as the “Kool Desktop Environment”.
- Since 2009, KDE now refers to the community of various applications and toolsets, not just the DE.

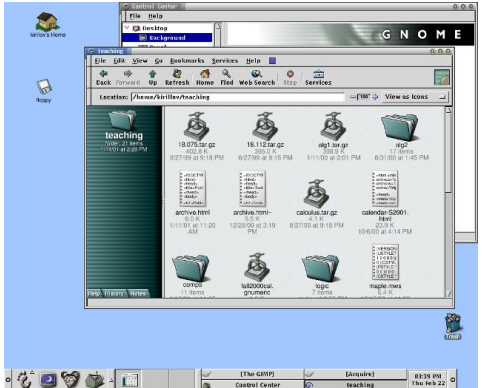


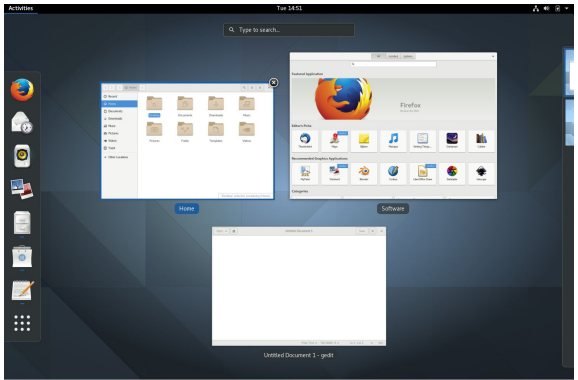




Examples: GNOME

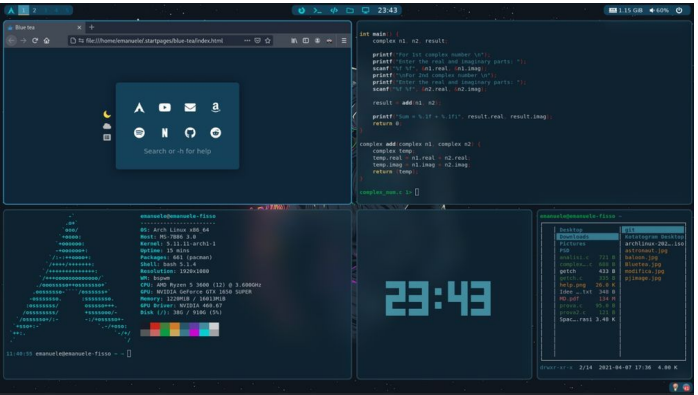
- The first stable version of GNOME (1.0) was released in March 1999, making the project over 24 years old.
- Originally stood for GNU Network Object Model Environment, though this acronym is no longer used officially.
- GNOME was created as a free software alternative to KDE, which at the time used the non-free Qt toolkit as previously mentioned.
- GNOME 3, released in 2011, marked a significant shift in the desktop's design philosophy and user interface, which was initially controversial among some users due to removing customization features and departing from the comfortable desktop-like design along with a focus on touch interfaces, which is reminiscent of Windows 8's DE.
- The DE has now evolved and improved but never truly returned to the traditional desktop design KDE and Windows share.

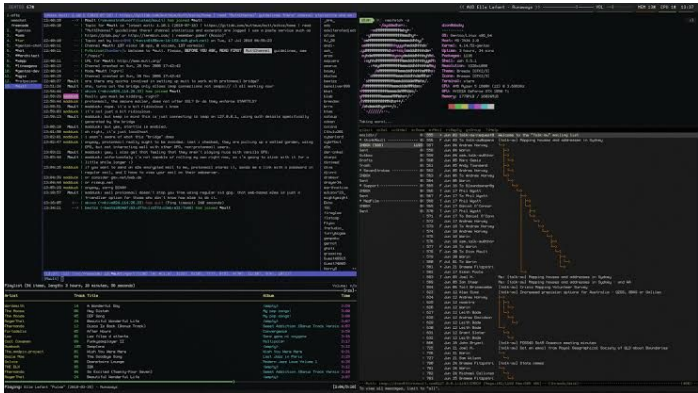




What's a Window Manager?

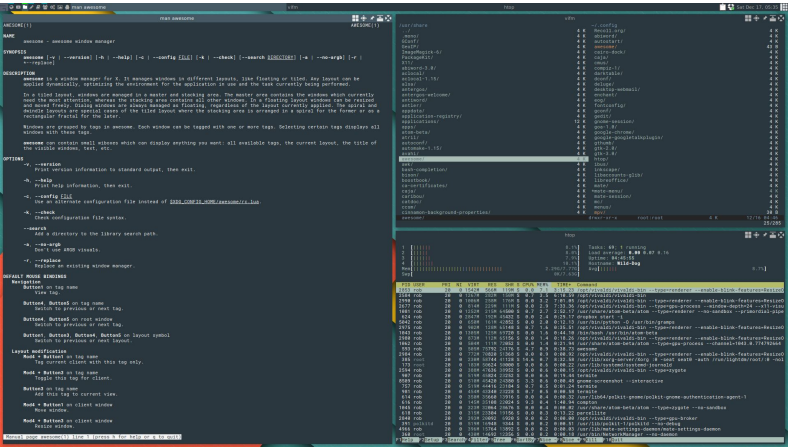
- A window manager (WM) controls the placement, size, appearance and behavior of a window on a screen.
- DE's have WMs already, with examples being GNOME's Mutter, and KDE's KWin.
- Despite that, you do not need a DE to have a WM. Window managers can be used all by themselves.
- This lack of the defining features of a DE makes standalone WM's feel very minimalistic and focused compared to something like Windows Shell.
- They often garner the most customizability, and are usually utilized with very little mouse input.
- Often "Workspace Oriented", with various workspaces have different sets of windows.

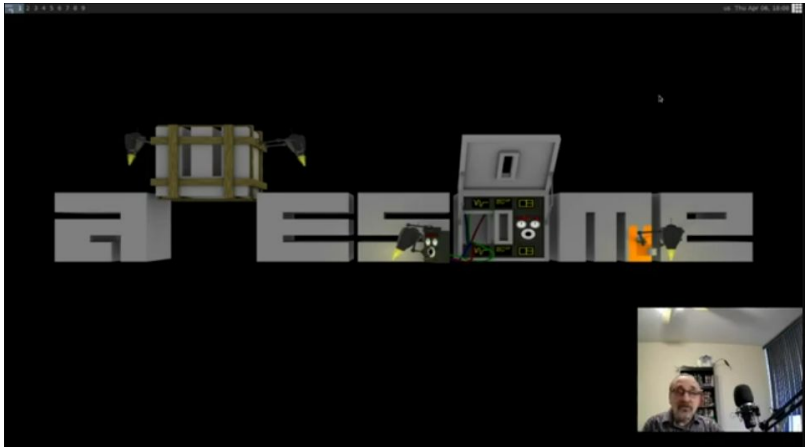




Examples: AwesomeWM

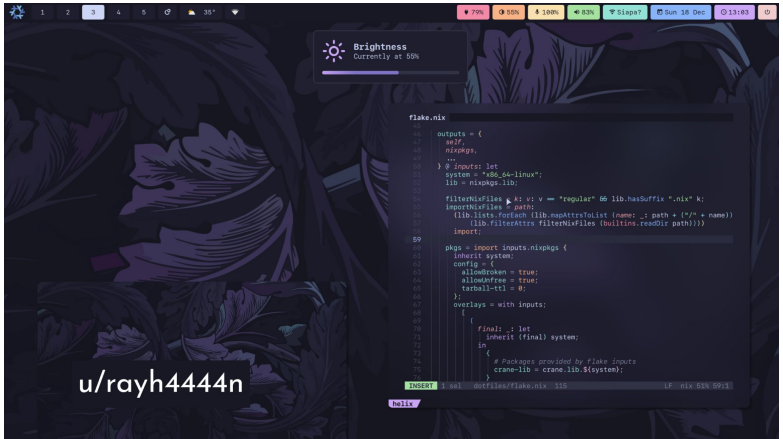
- AwesomeWM started as a fork of the dwm window manager. It was initially nicknamed "jdwm" after the initials of its creator, Julien Danjou.
- It's one of the few window managers that uses Lua for both configuration and extending functionality, making it highly customizable. Almost everything you need can be found in its rc.lua file.
- Has very extensive documentation for all of its features which is rare at times for window managers.
- It's easy to create custom widgets for its built-in status bar (wibar) using simple Lua scripting.

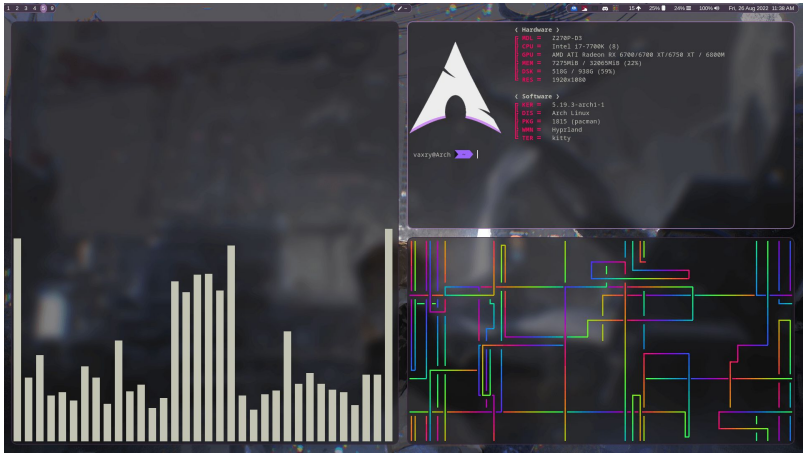




Examples: Hyprland

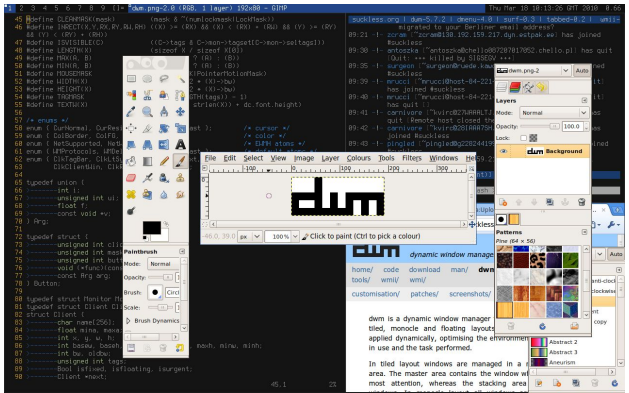
- Hyprland is an up-and-coming WM with an emphasis on functionality that doesn't skimp out on style.
- It's designed for the new Wayland, taking advantage of its modern features and protocols.
- It has built-in animations that can be customized along with the other aspects of its behavior through the hyprland.conf file.
- Has lots of window decoration options such as drop shadows and window dimming.
- Reloads automagically every time hyprland.conf is changed, which is nice for quickly seeing your changes to the settings.

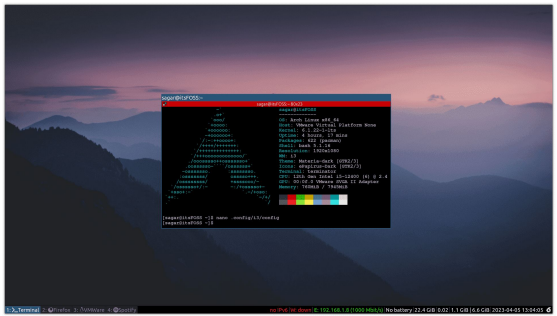


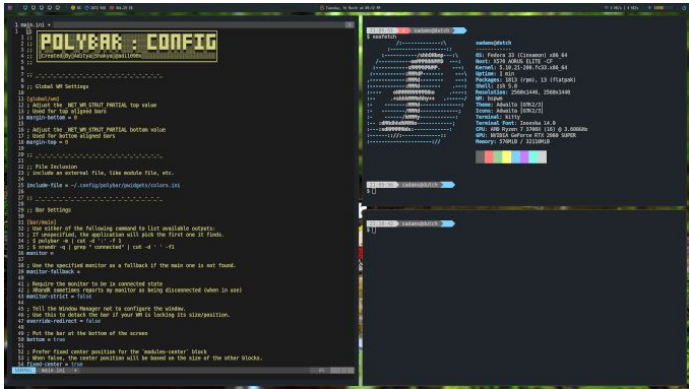


Honorable Mentions

- I3 - Features vi-like control system and an full interprocess communication (IPC) interface which allows it to be customized in various languages.
- Dwm (Dynamic Window Manager) - lacks external dependencies, with its customization done via editing the source code directly in C.
- Bspwm (Binary Space Partitioning Window Manager) - As the name suggests, it uses a binary space partitioning to manage windows, with them being represented as leaves of a binary tree. Configured mostly through shell scripts.

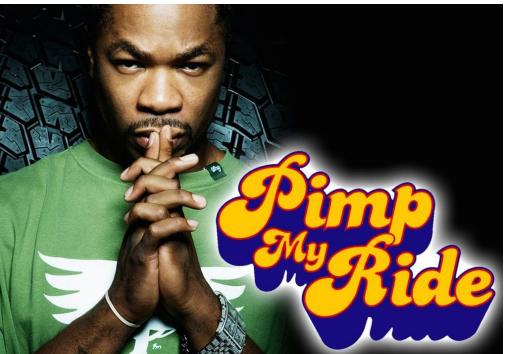






Ricing

- Ricing is simply a term for when you personalize and customize your desktop environment / window manager..
- The term "rice" is derived from "Race Inspired Cosmetic Enhancements," which refers to the modifications made to cars to improve their appearance rather than their performance.
- DE’s usually include means to customize their appearance, so this section will be more about window managers than desktop environments.
- The process is usually different for each WM, so I will mostly cover how to start ricing AwesomeWM and Hyprland.



How 2 Pimp 101: AwesomeWM

- Ricing in Awesome boils down to two things (mostly), your rc.lua file and your theme.lua file, which is usually in a folder with the assets that theme needs. The theme.lua controls the colors and appearance, and rc.lua controls the layout and control.
- Start by making a directory in .config called awesome, and the copy your default rc.lua and your default theme.lua file from its location in /usr/share/awesome
- Then you may bust out a text editor of your choice and you can begin customization.
- A good place to learn and experiment with configs is to go to https://awesomewm.org and navigate to the recipes section. The set of simple widgets and awesome-copycats sections are good to help add premade widgets and see how other people configure their system.
- I also have a demo from my personal laptop you may view!

How 2 Pimp 102: Hyprland

- Hyprland is slightly skeletal, so it may need additional applications in order to get it to how you want it.
- After downloading the package through your package manager, you'll want to navigate to ~/.config/hypr/hyprland.conf to begin tailoring it to your needs.
- In the config file, every configuration option is denoted with the following format : COMMAND=VALUE, with comments being denoted with # and sections denoted with *<nameofsection> {<contentsofsection>}*.
- What might not be immediately apparent is that the default config file does not have every configuration option listed, so you'll need to refer to https://wiki.hyprland.org/configuring/configuring-hyprland/ for the additional options.
- You won't have a built in bar like you do in AwesomeWM, so you'll need to find and make your own. I recommend Waybar(https://github.com/Alexays/Waybar) due to how easy it is to configure, with most of its visual elements being in css.
- https://hyprland.org/ also has a few examples you can look at which can really help you understand all that goes on in making a good rice.
- I also have an example demo of Hyprland!