

by L. Davenport

Affinity Designer is a full featured graphic design program that comes packed with a wide variety of tools. It is very useful for professional illustrators, web designers, game developers and other creatives looking to create high-quality concept art, print projects, logos, icons, UI designs, mock-ups and more. Unlike other art programs that are either a vector or a raster (bitmap) program, Affinity Designer lets you draw with both vector and raster graphics. So Affinity Designer is the best of both worlds letting you create vector drawings (using Bèzier tools, etc.) or Raster drawings/modifications using bitmap painting tools.

Working in Affinity Designer is fast. According to the Affinity web site: “(Affinity Designer can) Handle thousands of objects with no lag, organize with layer groups and color tagging, make precise selections with live outline view, and zoom one million(!) percent and beyond. It comes with hundreds of timesaving tools and functions. Match attributes for easy editing, set up grids, guides and planes effortlessly, link symbols and constraints, customize keyboard shortcuts, save your favorite workspace setups and more!”

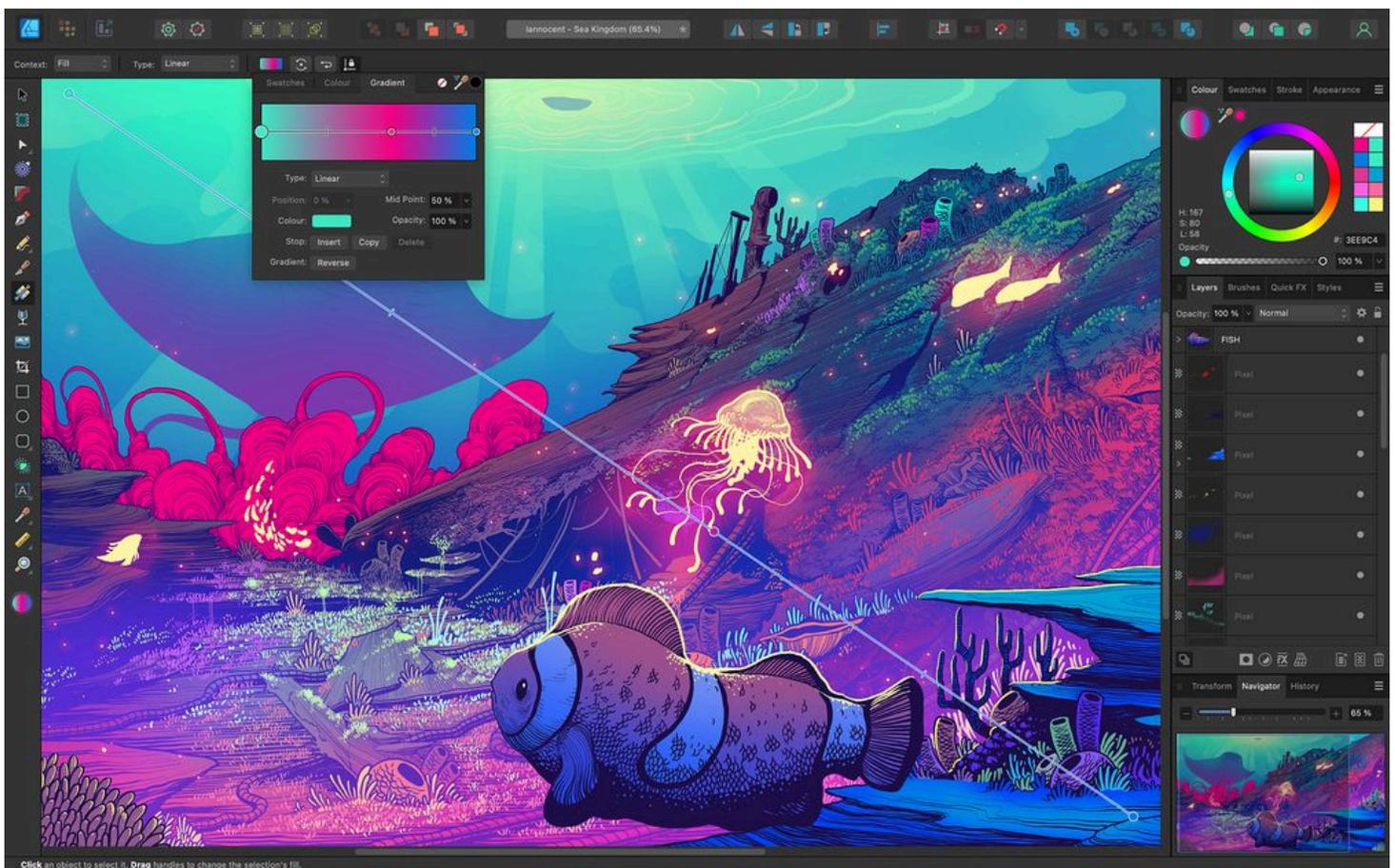


Figure 1. The Fill Tool lets you draw a color gradient, a solid, or a bitmap fill across your object. The created fill path can be edited directly on the object to introduce more than two colors along the gradient path, introduce opacity, reposition added colors or control color transitions.

Almost Infinite Zoom & Scale

Vector graphics (being based on mathematical expressions) are scalable without losing its sharpness; versus Raster images that are based on pixels which when scaled loose their clarity. This is one of the benefits of vector graphics over raster graphics. But not being satisfied with being able to view or scale their vector graphics to 500%, 1000%, etc. Serif gives you the option to scale/zoom down to 1,000,000% or more!

I had to try that for myself. Sure enough I was able zoom in to well over 1,000,000% on an image that I created. This really shows the power under Affinity Designer's hood!

ArtBoards

Artboards are separate design areas within the same document. You can place design elements in these artboards (Figure 8). Artboards possess

their own color and opacity properties, so these can be adjusted at any time during the design process. They can be exported and printed together or separately, and are all saved together in their parent document.

The size of artboards can be based on presets or customized to suit your needs. They can be moved and resized just like other objects in a document and can be arranged in any way you want. This can be important to the outcome of the design, or simply help you organize your work.

Typography

Text objects contain both character and paragraph elements. This makes it easy to modify standard text attributes such as font, size, format, and alignment. There are different types of text which give you flexibility when working with typography:

- **Artistic text:** This is best suited to decorative or artistic typographical design. Artistic text can be modified in many of the same ways as drawn objects, while still retaining standard text attributes. This makes it ideal for single words, headlines, pull quotes, etc.
- **Frame text:** Frame text is perfect for presenting paragraphs with a formalized structure and layout (for columns or text boxes). You can even add a shape to your document (such as a circle), convert it to a Text Frame, and then add text inside the oval. The text will be constrained to the oval's shape. This is basically the opposite of the Text Wrap feature where text wraps around a shape.
- **Text on a path:** Path text can be created from any line, curve or shape drawn using any of the line or shape tools (Figure 3). Text can flow on one or both sides of lines. You can control the start and end points and have control of all the normal text attributes, including baseline. The only criterion is that a line, curve, or shape must exist on the page before path text can be implemented.

History Options

- Instantly undo/redo over 8,000 History steps
- Store document states as Snapshots
- Save History so you can undo steps later even on different computers
- Undo actions performed in other Affinity suite apps
- A seamless AutoSave protects against unexpected shutdowns

Live Gradient Fills and Transparencies Options

- Draw gradients in your design, instantly and smoothly
- Apply color and transparency gradients to fills and outlines (Figure 1)
- Easily adjust the nodes and rates of change for gradients
- Use solid, linear, elliptical, radial, conical gradients and apply bitmaps
- Aspect ratio control (bitmap fill/transparency only)
- Linear and radial gradients respond to object scaling/shearing with skewed fill handle editing

BTW: I really like that the Gradient tool not only lets you specify the start and finish colors, but you can also set additional nodes (colors) plus adjust the rate of change in the gradient. So if you want, you could make a multicolored (rainbow) gradient.

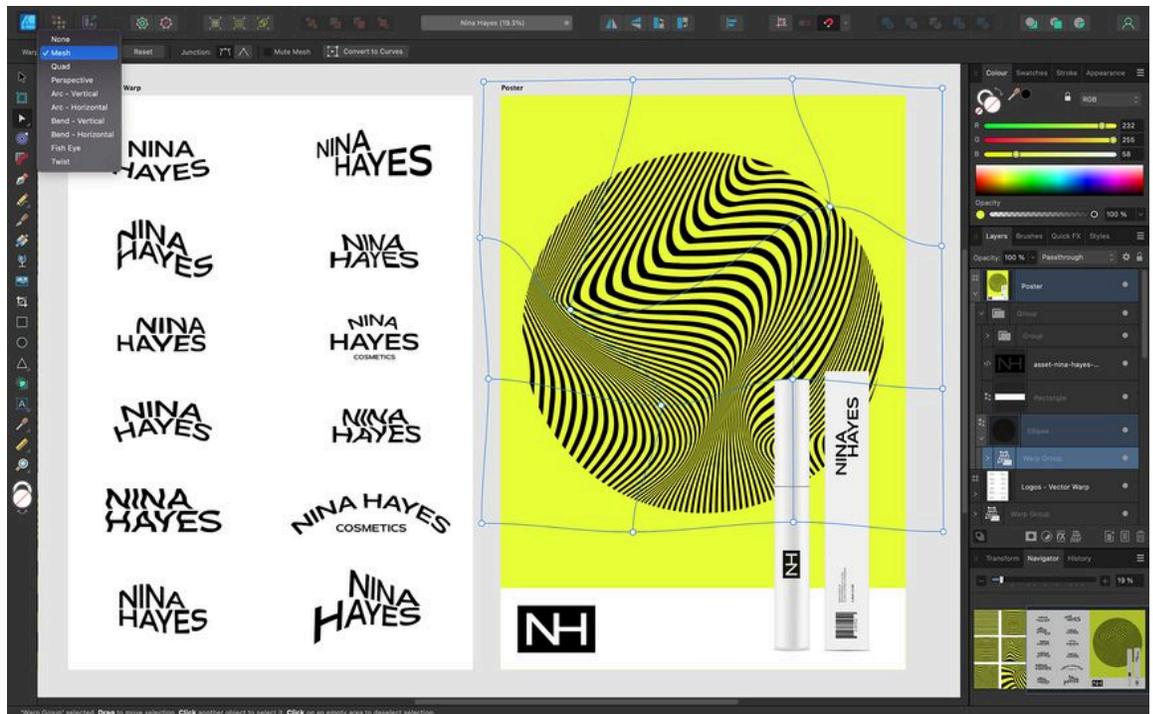


Figure 2. The powerful Vector Warp option allows you to apply a non-destructive vector warp over any vector artwork or text. Editing any warp offers a super-fast live preview, even on complex illustrations and gives a true vector end result.



Figure 3. An artist used the Text Path option to make his text follow the shape of two ribbons.

Previewing your designs before exporting

- **Vector view mode:** Drawn objects are displayed as vectors by default. This means that, regardless of the current zoom level, objects (and applied effects) are always presented with smooth, vector edges and transitions.
- **Pixel view mode:** During design, vector objects are presented as if they are constructed from individual pixels. This is an accurate representation of how your design will appear once exported and viewed as an image.
- **Retina pixel view mode:** This is like the Pixel mode above, but represents viewing on Retina and high DPI displays.
- **Outline (wireframe) view mode:** During design, page objects are presented as paths only (with no fills or strokes). All otherwise obscured paths are exposed, and selection behavior changes so grouped objects can immediately be selected just like ungrouped ones. In complex designs, this can be used to more easily target unlocked and locked objects for selection.
- **X-ray (wireframe) view mode:** Similar with the Outline view mode, but objects still display their fills at reduced opacity. On more complex designs or when zoomed in, this helps to interpret the view better (left side/view of Figure 7).
- **Hairline view mode:** This is for CAD documents. The Hairline mode displays designs as CAD apps would display them. All lines are displayed as thin lines so line weights are ignored, regardless of zoom level.

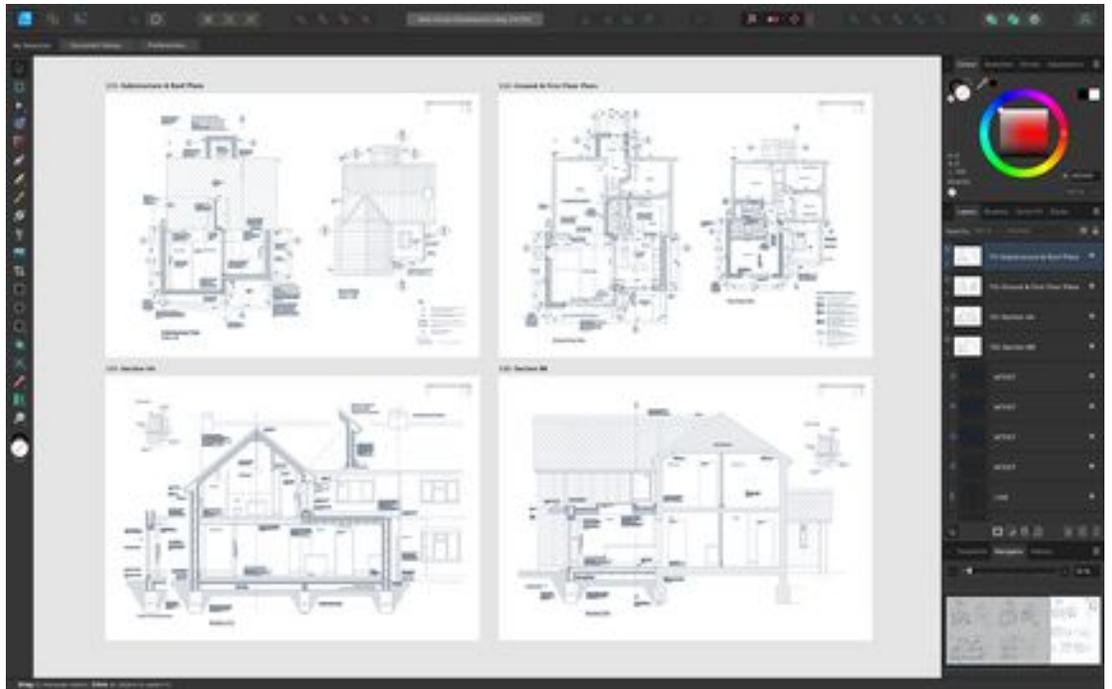


Figure 4. You can import and edit AutoCAD and DXF files quickly and accurately, maintaining the layer structure and scale of the original file.

Open or Import List

- Affinity Designer can open these standard files: PSD, PDF, SVG, EPS, TIFF, PNG, JPG, GIF, BMP, EXR (Open EXR), RAW, TGA, and HDR (Radiance)
- Affinity Design can also open these less frequently used formats: WebP file, JPEG XL, AutoCAD DWG/DXF (import, place and edit - maintaining layer structure and scaling), and HIF (HDR 10 bit PQ encoded produced by newer Canon cameras).

Some of the new Affinity Designer version 2 features:

- **Vector Warp:** This hugely powerful addition lets you apply a non-destructive warp over any vector artwork or text. Choose between a fully customizable mesh, or use presets including arcs, perspective, fisheye and twists. Editing a warp gives a super-fast live preview, even on complex illustrations, and gives a true vector end result (Figure 2).
- **Measure Tool:** The Measure Tool lets you measure the distance between objects, between an object and a page element (e.g., a placed guide, the page center or the page edge), or between guides (Figure 6). This can



Figure 5. The Area Tool can calculate the area of one or more objects plus the perimeter of a shape and open curve lengths.

be done vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

- **Area Tool:** The Area Tool allows you to determine the area, perimeter, and segment length of a closed shape.

As well as individual objects, you can measure multiple objects' areas (Figure 5). The tool will also calculate object areas with holes in them, without the hole being included in the measurement.

- **Shape Builder Tool:** Add and subtract geometric and closed shapes into a single, identifiable real-world shape, like a guitar (Figure 10). Quickly create complex shapes by simply dragging between segments to combine or holding a modifier to subtract.
- **Knife Tool:** Slice any shape, curve or text into component parts. A stabilizer provides even greater precision and scissor functionality allows you to click on any node or segment of a curve and split it (Figure 9).
- **DWG/DXF Import:** You can import and edit AutoCAD and DXF files quickly and accurately, maintaining the layer structure and scale of the original file. With functions like Multi Layer Import, Color Override and Auto-scale, the import quality is second to none (Figure 4).
- **X-Ray View:** A new view mode shows the makeup of your work, which is particularly useful for selecting a specific curve or object within a complex artwork.

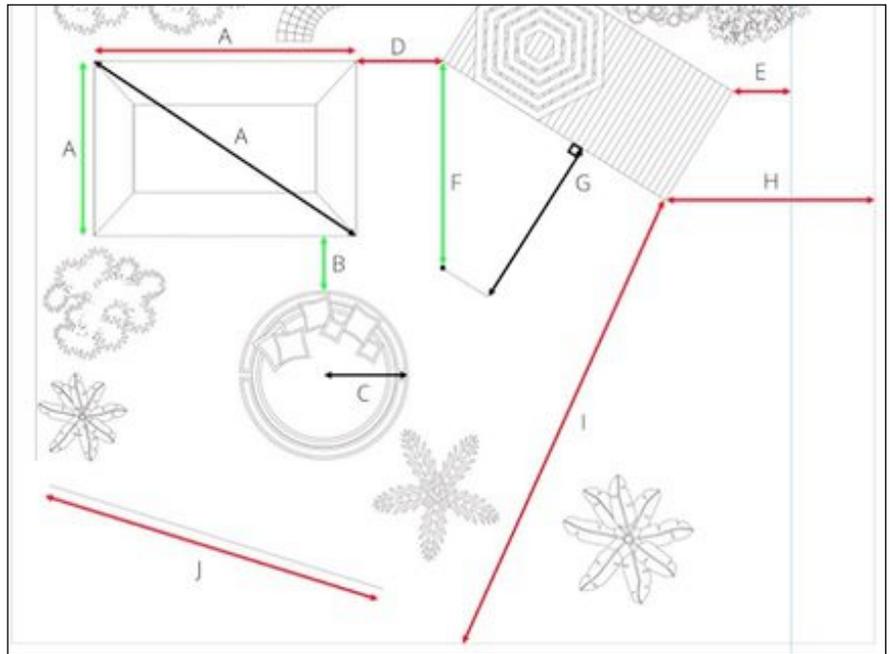


Figure 6. The Measure Tool lets you measure the distance between various points in your document, e.g.: (A) Point - Point (horizontally, vertically, diagonally), (B) Point - Curve, (C) Point - Center, (D) Point - Line, (E) Point - Guide, (F) Point - Page center, (G) Point - Page center (tangent; with projection line), (H) Point - Page edge and (I) Point - Page edge at Page center and (J) Along a diagonal straight line.

Additional new and still useful tools and features

- Drag-and-drop bitmap fill creation with intelligent scaling
- HSL Color Wheel has 'box' wheel type and offers recent colors and hex code readout/input
- Convert artistic text to frame text, and vice versa
- Paste Style support for copied text selections
- Isolation (Solo) mode offers better group control
- Rasterize selected layers simultaneously
- Normals adjustment for editing normal maps from material and texturing workflows
- There is a Preference to Limit initial zoom to a maximum of 100% for icon designers
- Place linked web images using their URLs via ctrl+drag-and-drop (for the Affinity Designer desktop version only)
- Dropbox API integration to retain placed resource linkage across multiple devices
- Boolean Geometry: This lets you join, intersect, subtract, divide, and combine shape outlines to make new shapes. For example you can draw a circle and then have it subtract (remove the underlying area) when you place it over a drawn piece of cheese - whalah! Swiss Cheese! It's fun to watch it subtract in real time as

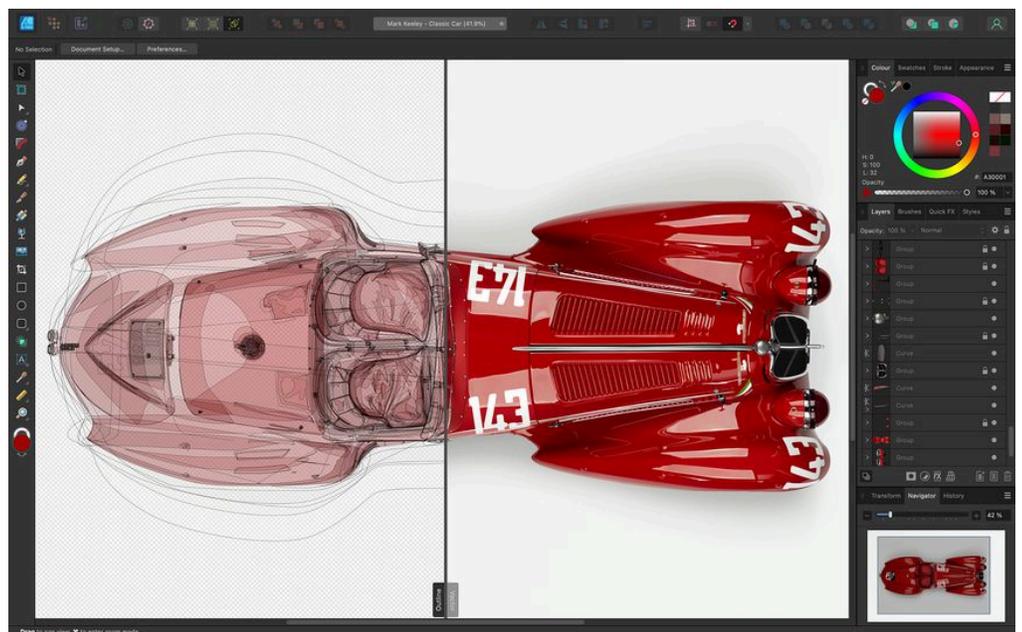


Figure 7. The Split view Presents two modes simultaneously on the same page. A sliding divider can be repositioned to view different areas of the design in either mode.

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you drag it over another object.

- **Layers & Masks:** Layers can be used to organize your work into grouped items, re-order your objects, or make a layer a parent or child. You can also drag vector or raster layers into Affinity Designer's Layers panel to quickly clip and mask your images.

- **Insert or Paste Inside:** You can add artwork within other shapes and layers or insert behind or above the current layer. Before I learned about this tool, I was always using the Gradient tool to shade my objects. A gradient tool is great, but not optimal for all instances. So now I can draw a secondary shape over an area of the first object, change its color, use the Layer Effects tool to feather the new shape's color, cut this (feathered) shape, and then use the Paste Inside option to apply it to the first shape. Instant shading or highlighting. So with the Insert/Paste Inside, the Gradient tool, and the Pixel tools in the Pixel Persona, you have three ways to shade your objects.

- **Power Duplicate:** This lets you create repeating, scaling, and rotating designs. For example, you can use the Power Duplicate to quickly make a grid of objects (like the stars on a flag). Or after you create a star, duplicate it; move it to the right and down a little; plus give it a slight spin. Affinity Designer will remember the new position, scale, and rotation. So with a quick (repeated) key combination you can create a spiraling line of stars that rotate and progressively get smaller.

These are only a few of the available tools and options. There are too many to go into detail in this review. If you are interested, I suggest you go to the [Affinity Web site](http://www.affinity.serif.com) and read all of the descriptions to see all of the available options.

Testing Affinity Designer's import capabilities

After testing out Affinity Designer's capabilities, I wanted to see if it was truly able to open other formats. So I took a complex wiring schematic that I created in Photoshop and dragged-and-dropped it onto the Affinity Designer icon. It opened without a hitch. All of the 86 layers (including text) appeared in the Affinity Designer Layers palette. Afterward I dragged-and-dropped an Adobe® Illustrator®, SVG, and an PDF file onto the Affinity Designer icon. Every one quickly opened. Disclaimer: I didn't have very complex files, so I can't swear to the total compatibility of the Illustrator and SVG files. So if those are the formats that you work in, I suggest that you download the trial copy and see for yourself if everything imports correctly. BTW: According to Serif, Affinity Designer can also open Adobe® FreeHand® files (versions 9-11).

Graphics Tablet & Multitouch Device Support

- **Graphics Tablets:** A number of the Affinity tools

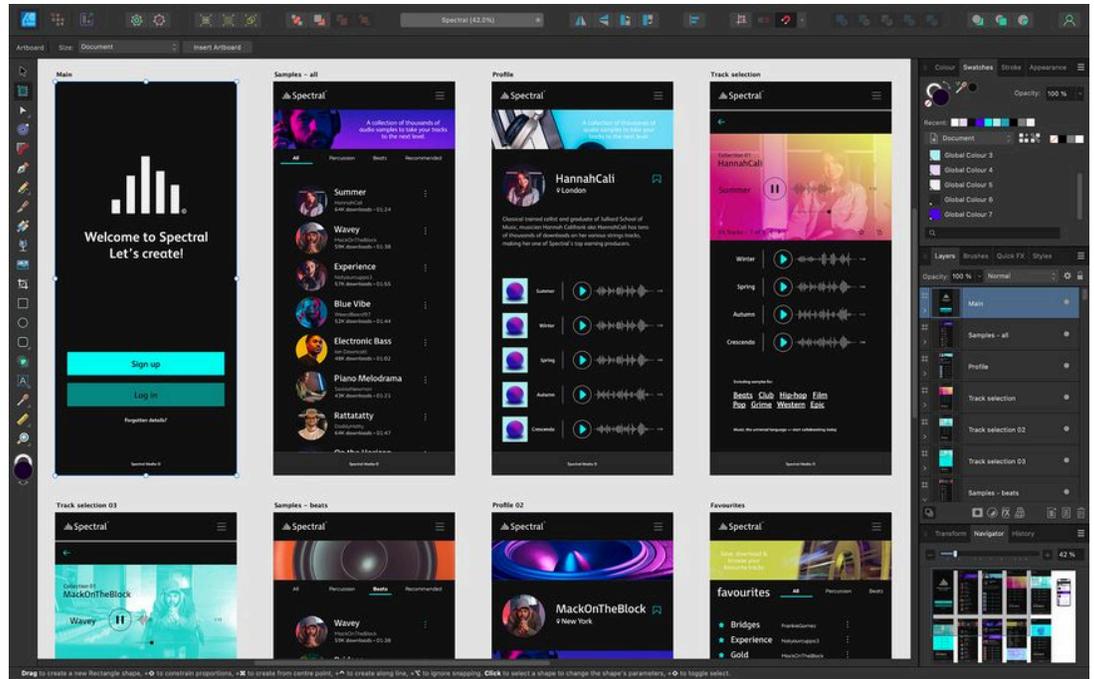


Figure 8. You can lay out all of your screens, pages, menus and other items across an unlimited number of Artboards.



Figure 9. The Knife Tool lets you draw a freehand or straight cutting line across any open curve or shape to split the object up into smaller fragments.

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and settings can be used to provide perfect precision when using a pressure-sensitive pen tablet. BTW: For some tablet pens, the pen's eraser (using the opposite end of the pen) will activate the Erase Brush Tool. This feature is geared towards the Wacom tablets but does work with various other pen tablets.

- **Multitouch Device:** Affinity products are also designed to be used in conjunction with multitouch devices (Magic Mouse and trackpads), including those with Force Touch pressure-sensitive capability (Magic Trackpad 2 and built into recent MacBooks).

Sidecar

Apple's Sidecar option can be used to extend or mirror your Mac desktop onto your iPad's display. With this functionality, you can draw on your iPad using an Apple Pencil to edit documents in your Affinity Mac app.

When using Sidecar, the Affinity Designer program supports pressure-sensitive input from an Apple Pencil on your iPad's screen. Sidecar works with one iPad at a time, but it can be used alongside additional external displays.

Your iPad can also become a secondary display, allowing you to arrange windows however you want between the Mac and iPad.

Affinity Designer v2 for the iPad

There is also a full featured Affinity Designer App for the iPad (Figure 11). It has everything you need to produce stunning brochures, posters, portfolios, magazines and much more, no matter where you are. It is iPad OS 16-ready, and is compatible with iPads from the iPad Mini (5 & 6) up to the iPad Pro (all models). It is also optimized for: Grand Central Dispatch (GCD), Core Graphics, Metal, 64-bit engine, Apple Pencil, Retina display, and the Smart/Magic keyboard. Plus documents are interchangeable between the Mac and iPad versions of Affinity Designer [I brought an image from my iPad to my Mac, double clicked on it, and it immediately opened in my Mac version of Affinity Designer. No hesitation - no problems!]

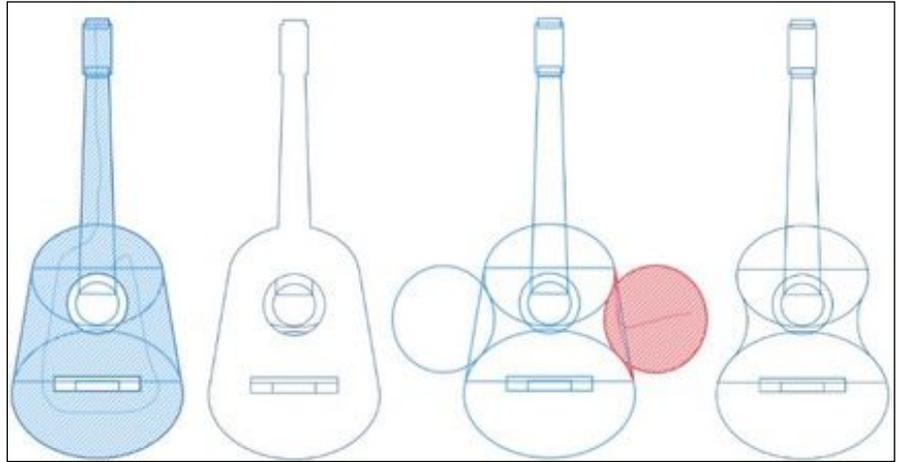


Figure 10. The Shape Building feature lets you add shapes and segments to quickly create new complex shapes (first two images on the left side). Conversely, you can use shapes to cut away parts of your design to create a new shape (right two images).



Figure 11. There is also a full featured Affinity Designer App for the iPad.

The Skinny

Evaluation: I was quite pleased with the capabilities of Affinity Design. Being able to use my pen tablet to draw my varying width lines etc. is a real plus.

Requirements: Mac: macOS Catalina 10.15 - Ventura 13; A Mac with the Apple silicon (M1/M2) chip or Intel processor; 8GB RAM, 2.8GB of available hard drive space (more during installation), 1280 x 768 display or larger.

iPad: iPadOS 15 or later; iPad mini (5 & 6) to to the iPad Pro (all models) - M1-equipped iPad models are recommended for more memory-intensive design.

Company: [Serif \(Europe\) Limited](#)

Price: Mac: Affinity Designer v2: \$40.99

iPad: Affinity Designer v2: \$11.99

Windows: Affinity Designer v2: \$40.99

Mac, Windows AND iPad: Affinity V2 Universal License (bundle price for ALL three Mac and Windows applications [Photo, Designer, & Publisher] and ALL three iPad Apps): \$99.99 vs. \$169.99 if all the programs and iOS Apps were bought individually with the current sale.

[Available Demo Copy](#) (at the bottom of the web page)