

Wacom Intuos 4 Tablet

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It may surprise some computer users, but not everyone uses a mouse. Yes, some use trackballs, or touch pads, but for complete precision and control, there's nothing like using a tablet/stylus combination. The Intuos 4 tablet is Wacom's latest model and it's a real winner!

Sleek and black, its elegance is apparent beginning with the packaging. Black on black with a stark white display, the tablet carries out that motif. At first glance, the tablet seems totally black, as opposed to the light/dark grey tones of the Intuos 3. Once plugged in and installed, however, the tablet comes to life (and light!).

Installation was a breeze. There are three steps, visually illustrated on the inside of the box. Put in the CD, follow the instructions, plug in the tablet. The tablet comes with both a stylus and a mouse. Because I prefer the former, I opened the Tablet Properties dialog to set the stylus' dual-function rocker switch to mimic mouse clicks. By default, pressing on the side nearest the point is a right-click, and pressing the opposite end is a double-left-click. I guess I just have to be different; I prefer the reverse.

As with all other Wacom styli (styluses?) turning it over activates the Eraser function. Touch the stylus to the tablet and drag to select text in *Word*, for instance, then lift the stylus from the tablet to delete the selection. In a painting program, turning it over accesses the Eraser tool as long as that end is in use. Even this, however, can be changed. Touching that end to the tablet could activate "Show Desktop" or open another application.

The tip it uses is replaceable. One of the accessories is a holder for the stylus. Nice touch, but even nicer when you realize it holds the replacement nibs, of which there are ten of varying types including hard felt nibs for drawing. There's even a little tool for removing the old tip.

After the computer recognized the tablet, the ExpressKeys and Touch Ring down one side lit up. This model has eight



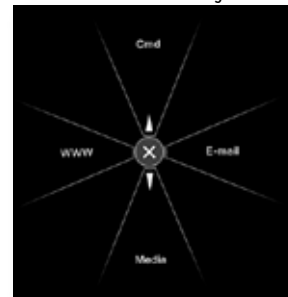
ExpressKeys with an illuminated display, so you always know which button does what. Along which side, you may ask? That's up to you. This tablet is ambidextrous by design. Rotate the tablet to access controls for either left- or right-handed use. There are also two USB cable ports to more easily accommodate your workspace setup. You can control the brightness of the tablet's display; plus after three minutes of inactivity it dims, and after six minutes it's turned off.

I turned the tablet so the ExpressKeys/Touch Ring were on my left and plugged in the power cord. By default the tablet is set to display the ExpressKeys on the left, meaning the illuminated display is read in that orientation. If I change it to "ExpressKeys Right" the display rotates, so if I turn the tablet around the words are still readable. Using the "Left" setting my left hand lingers along that side of the tablet. No longer do I need to roam over the keyboard to access shortcuts and modifier keys such as Alt, Ctrl or Shift. They're on the tablet.

One ExpressKey displays the Radial Menu (top image), a circular on-screen menu you click through to access editing tools, navigation, media controls, etc. This is perhaps the coolest thing in the entire Intuos 4 model line. There are eight segments, four of which are already mapped. I have to admit to some satisfaction when clicking WWW opened *Firefox* and E-mail actually opened *Thunderbird* instead of defaulting to the MS apps

You can map anything you please to the other four segments; actually, to any of the eight. And each one can open another radial submenu, itself with eight subdivisions. The Cmd menu (lower image) demonstrates the potential. Can we say control?

The Touch Ring is another marvel. Its preset four functions are Auto Scroll/Zoom, Cycle





Layers, Brush Size and Canvas Rotation. Press the center ring to move between them. Drag your finger around the ring to, well, do whichever. Its functionality is dependent on the currently active program.

You can't "rotate canvas" in *Word*, for instance (*Word* doesn't have a

canvas), but scrolling through a document just got easier. No button to hold down or drag - just a finger.

If you do nothing more than take the tablet out of the box and install it, you're completely functional. But - if you do a little exploring there's so much more. You open the PDF manual by clicking the Help button from the Tablet Properties dialog. (If I could make one change, it'd be to make this more obvious.) Once it opened, I saved it to my desktop for frequent reference while I was learning.

For instance, you can customize the function of the Touch Ring or any of the ExpressKeys. Not only that, they can do different things in different applications. The default setting for the top ExpressKey is Help, which displays the current settings. Except when I'm using Firefox, when that key opens a new tab for browsing, and when I'm in Word, it opens the Styles and Formatting frame.

Probably the majority of tablet users work in either *Photoshop*, *Photoshop Elements* or *Painter*. Which is sort of a shame, because a tablet offers so much more in functionality and comfort than any other pointing device, regardless of the program you're using. Be that as it may, in addition to

being able to customize the ExpressKeys and Touch Ring settings, the Intuos 4 tablet reacts twice as sensitively to the touch of the stylus as before.

There are now 2,028 levels of pressure sensitivity, which means if your graphics or painting program recognizes that feature you can change your brush size, the "paint" opacity, etc. If the program is designed to work with a tablet (what Wacom calls "Integrated for Tablet Control") it may override or change the function of one or more ExpressKeys. If that happens, the display updates itself.

This is an awesome tool. Much more than a mouse-substitute, the Intuos 4 tablet is designed to be an equal player on your desktop when it comes to input and control over your computer and the programs you use.

The controls are perfectly situated and the customization feature really lets you make it yours. If you're not using an Intuos 4, especially if you're in the graphics or design field, you're behind the curve. Way behind.

About: Wacom Intuos 4 Tablet

Manufacturer: Wacom

<http://intuos.wacom.com/Americas/specs.php>

Price:

Medium size: 8.8" x 5.5" workspace \$369 list; \$335 @ Amazon; \$349.99 @ CostCo.

Requires:

Windows XP (SP2+), Windows Vista, Mac OS X 10.4.8+.
Note: Also requires color display, powered USB port, CD/DVD drive, and broadband Internet connection to download bundled software.

