

Best pro photo editors for Mac 2019 – From MacWorld

With programs like Affinity and Pixelmator Pro, it's no longer the case that Photoshop is king when it comes to image editing software. We take a look at the best Mac photo editors for creative professionals.

By [Keir Thomas](#) | 01 Feb 19



Few people would dispute the near-magical features of Photoshop, as well as ancillary apps like Lightroom and Camera RAW, but there has been criticism about its high subscription fees. However, there are plenty of challengers for the photo editing software crown, especially on the Mac.

We take a look at some pretenders to the crown here, and their benefit is chiefly in terms of value for **money** - most charge one-off purchase prices, rather than monthly subscription fees, and some are ridiculously inexpensive considering what they offer.

Adobe, on the other hand, charges an arm and a leg. True, you can get just Photoshop and Lightroom for around £120/US\$120 per year via the [Photography subscription](#), but even this is considered by many to be a form of extortion. (If you are set on Adobe CC, check out [this comprehensive buying guide](#) on our sister site Tech Advisor).

Generally speaking, there are two categories of apps reviewed here: actual image editors, and image processors. The latter category includes apps designed to take images straight from a camera and improve them by fixing things like distortions introduced by lenses, or correct colour balance.

Some might include basic image editing tools, but they're not about unbridled creativity like the actual editing apps, which typically offer toolbars offering direct image-editing tools.

Many image-processing apps focus on improving RAW files, which is the data taken straight from the camera's image sensor prior to any processing taking place within

the phone or camera itself. This offers the most scope for improvement because as much of the image data as possible is present and none has yet been discarded or manipulated.

For this group test we were only interested in professional photo editing software aimed at the photo editor who needs power and flexibility. But if you're looking to pay even less than this and can compromise on features, take a look at our roundup of the [best free & cheap photo editors for Mac](#).

Without further ado, here are the best Mac photo editors.

1. [Affinity Photo](#)



- **Rating:** 4.5
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** £48.99
- **Buy** [from App Store](#)

Although Affinity Photo might be priced at a level where amateurs can snap it up, its makers are keen to stress a professional feature set. You get CMYK and Lab colour space support, for example, which is a necessity when working accurately in the print design industry. It's a Mac RAW photo editor too, and the app claims the best support for Photoshop's ubiquitous .psd file format outside of Photoshop itself.

Affinity Photo is a power tool. Although it can indeed make subtle tweaks, just like any image editor, doing so feels like you're using a Bugatti Veyron to go to Sainsbury's.

With an asking price of just [£48.99/\\$49.99](#), this app is a bona fide bargain. For semi-pro and even pro-level editing it really is a competitor for Adobe Photoshop.

Read our [Affinity Photo review](#).

2. [Pixelmator](#)



- **Rating:** 4
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** £28.99
- **Buy** [from App Store](#)

Pixelmator has a lot of fans in the Mac world, where its combination of amazing value for money plus extensive feature list makes it the most likely candidate for a swap-in Photoshop replacement. In fact, it's hard not to notice the influence of Adobe's product when working within Pixelmator: you'll certainly find most of its key tools, all within an interface that looks beautiful and fits in entirely with the macOS aesthetic.

This is not to say that every tool you might be used to is present in Pixelmator. For example, while Clone and Heal tools are present, there's no Patch tool, or Context-Aware Move tool, or History Brush.

However, none of this is an accident. Pixelmator deliberately keeps things simpler than Adobe's effort, which means it has found a home with amateur and semi-pro image editors who use it occasionally, rather than daily.

Read our [Pixelmator review](#).

3. [DxO OpticsPro for Photos](#)



- **Rating:** 4
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Buy** [from App Store](#)

There's a lot to like in DxO Optics Pro. Our complaints are slight and revolve around the time taken to process the image when dragging it around while zoomed, as one example. Typically, this was a couple of seconds, and on slower computers might be even longer. Additionally, there doesn't appear to be a zoom tool for quick zooming in and out, with the maximum zoom level capped at 200% too.

Other than Photoshop, DxO Optics Pro's nearest competition is [Capture One Pro](#), but DxO Optics Pro is much cheaper and a lot easier to use too, relying largely on one or two sliders within each tool for the sake of simplicity. True, you don't get the incredible control over fine details that you do with Capture One Pro, but do you really need it? For simply pushing your RAW images so that you (relatively) quickly get the best out of them, DxO Optics Pro is a winner.

Read our [DxO OpticsPro for Photos review](#).

4. [CyberLink PhotoDirector 10](#)



- **Rating:** 4
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** £79.99
- **Buy** [from CyberLink](#)
- **Buy** [from Amazon for £62.18](#)

PhotoDirector 9 is something of a dark horse among Mac photo editors because, initially, you might notice only its organising and sharing features. However, dig a little deeper and you'll find powerful tools for editing images, despite the app avoiding a toolbar-style approach and mostly eschewing the use of Photoshop-style pen/brush tools.

Positioned firmly in the semi-pro area, PhotoDirector 9 takes a fresh approach that means it's packed with features but operates unlike most other photo-editing apps we've looked at. Rather than take a tool-based approach, the app prefers to walk you through tweaks and edits.

You can almost certainly achieve the same things as you might with something like Photoshop - and perhaps more, such as the ability to tweak 360 degree photos - but it can be a little frustrating getting used to the app and finding where everything lives.

Read our [CyberLink PhotoDirector 10 review](#).

5. [Acorn 6](#)



- **Rating:** 3.5
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** £28.99
- **Buy** [from App Store](#)

In many ways Acorn feels and looks like a snapshot of Photoshop from a decade or two ago - with a selection of more modern and useful Photoshop tools mixed in. You get all the tools that made Photoshop so great, such as levels and curves to adjust an image's brightness/contrast, as well masking, layers, and various filters.

However, it does also miss out on the rare useful innovations that have come along, like the heal and patch tools, or advanced selection tools that let you select by colour range, amongst other things.

If you prefer simpler software then Acorn is for you. The price is pretty competitive too.

However, it's hard for us to commend Acorn when something like [Affinity Photo](#)(£48.99/[US\\$49.99](#)) or [Pixelmator](#)(£28.99/[US\\$29.99](#)) offer substantially more image editing flexibility and power, yet are also still easily within the budget of professional or enthusiast users. Ultimately, Acorn is very good Photoshop alternative, but its competition is simply better.

Read our [Acorn 6 review](#).

6. [GIMP 2.8](#)



- **Rating:** 3.5
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** Free
- **Buy** [from GIMP Team](#)

On macOS the GIMP looks alien and its interface feels overly complicated; it can be baffling working out how to use its tantalising feature set. GIMP isn't a clone of Photoshop, nor does it want to be. There can also be some glitches.

But familiarity will build, and there's much to recommend GIMP. Especially if you literally can't afford to spend any money but still need genuine image editing power above and beyond applying silly filters to images. We're grateful GIMP exists simply for this reason.

Read our [GIMP 2.8 review](#).

7. Fotor Photo Editor



- **Rating:** 3
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** Free (\$39.99/year for Fotor Pro)
- **Buy** [from Fotor](#)

Is Fotor Photo Editor a Photoshop clone or wannabe? Not even close. It is to Photoshop what a ZX Spectrum is to the iMac Pro: a relative, perhaps, but laughably not in the same league.

However, there are some powerful tools built in that belie the free price tag, and considered for what it actually is - which is an image tweaker and improver, like those countless apps for your iPhone; one-click filters and fixes are the order of the day - then it's actually very good.

But rather irritatingly, several very useful features require you upgrade to Fotor Pro; if you don't, a watermark is placed over the image when you use the tool in question. And whether you'd want to spend [US\\$39.99 a year](#) (around around £30.54) or [\\$8.99 per month](#) (around £6.86) to upgrade is questionable, especially if you're looking for high-level image correction and editing. You can download the app from [Fotor's site](#) or from [iTunes](#).

Read our [Fotor Photo Editor review](#).

8. [Movavi Photo Editor for Mac](#)



- **Rating:** 2.5
- **Reviewed on:** 9 July 18
- **RRP:** £29.95
- **Buy** [from Movavi](#)

There are lots of one-click Mac image editors out there, but typically they're aimed at the lower end of the market. Movavi Photo Editor has one foot in this camp but has some tools that could make it a useful installation for professionals.

Chief amongst them is Object Removal, which lets you define an area of the image that will then be magically removed. Everything from facial blemishes to telegraph wires to photobombing seagulls can be eradicated by using the provided brush tool to draw over the object, and the results are excellent.

However, other tools we tested were less impressive; filters, for instance, take several seconds to be applied. There might be promise in this approach but it's not there yet.

Movavi's price puts it in the same bracket as the likes of [Affinity Photo](#) (£48.99/[US\\$49.99](#)) or [Pixelmator](#) (£28.99/[US\\$29.99](#)), both of which are simply several times more impressive and useful, and are to be recommended instead.

Read our [Movavi Photo Editor for Mac review](#).