Using Your iPad as a Graphics Tablet for your Mac

Overview

Anyone with an iPad and Apple Pencil can use them as a graphics tablet for their Mac. There are two possible ways to do this: Astropad, which is a third party app that installs onto both the iPad and the Mac, and Sidecar, which is a built-in feature of the latest versions of iOS and MacOS (accessible only on more recent iPads and Macs). A breakdown of each follows. Both work over WiFi (more latency) and via USB cable (less latency).

Astropad

In my opinion, [Astropad](#) is superior to Apple's Sidecar for using your iPad as a graphics tablet. It's more responsive and was designed with illustrators and designers in mind. To use Astropad, you simply get the app for your iPad and download/install the desktop version on your Mac. (I am less familiar with Astropad's PC-oriented product, LunaDisplay, but it may also provide the same functionality for PC users.)

There are two versions of Astropad:
• Standard: one time purchase from App store but fewer features.
• Studio: monthly subcription but more features.

I have broken down the differences on my blog: https://www.tomfroese.com/blog/astropad-studio-vs-astropad-standard-which-should-you-get.

Personally, I use Studio. If you're on the fence, Studio is available for a 30 day free trial, so it doesn't hurt to go with that for now. Standard is not available for trial: you have to put down the $29.99.
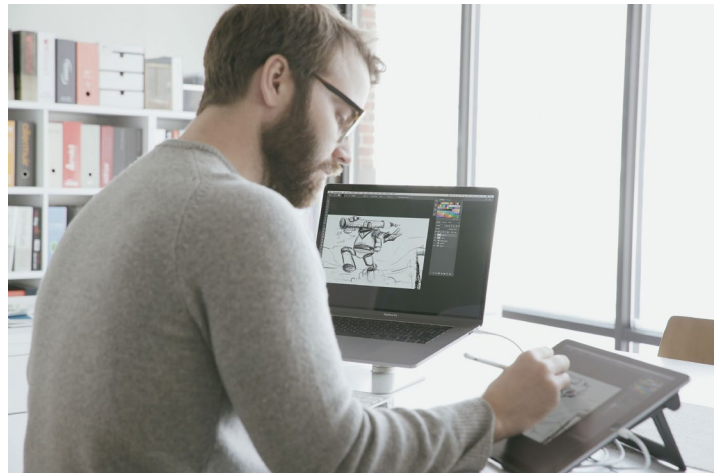

Photo: Astropad.com

Sidecar

Sidecar is Apple's answer to Astropad. It comes built into newer Apple products, and as such, there is no additional purchase required. Yay! No more subscriptions! That being said, I have tried it and find it lacks in functionality and just doesn't feel the same way when I use it. For instance, I have to apply more pressure to get the same flow/thickness from my digital brushes. But if you're new to the game, starting with Sidecar may mean you'll get used to it rather than to Astropad and therefore addicted to a $79.99 annual subscription!
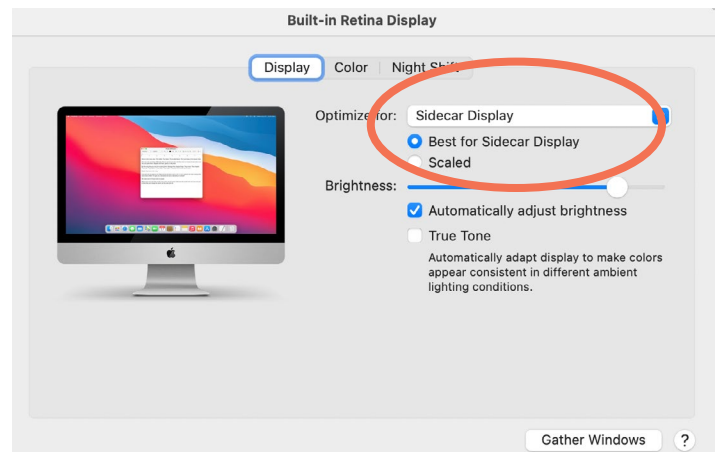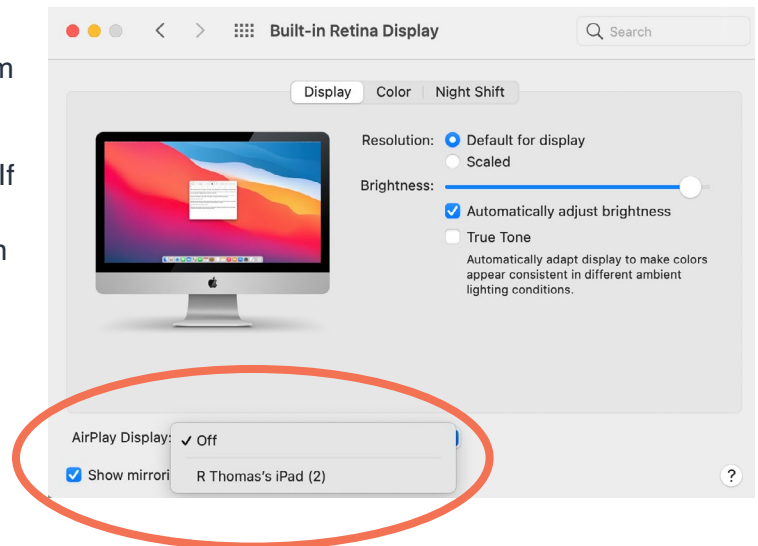
To run Sidecar, go to Displays in System Preferences on your Mac, find the AirPlay Display selector at the bottom left, and select your iPad from the list.

You will then see a new window with more options. If you have a larger screen on your Mac (mine is a 27 inch retina display), it's going to look rather small on the iPad.

To make everything fill the iPad screen nicely, I recommend that you also select Optimize for: Sidecar Display.

Photo: Apple.com

Optimizing for Sidecar Display