

# Gimp 2.4

Though it's easier to use and has significant new features, **Dale Strickland-Clark** wonders whether Gimp now has what it takes to attract new professional users.

## In brief...

» An image creation and editing tool with a comprehensive set of features. Consider also *Krita* and *Pixel Image Editor*.

**W**ith the last major release of *Gimp* being over two and a half years ago, you'd be forgiven for thinking that progress had ground to a halt. The arrival of 2.4 shows otherwise and has some treats for Linux artisans.

The new look is the first thing you notice. At first it seems to be just a fresh icon theme but there is a little more to it than that. The *Gimp* team have adopted the principals of the Tango Desktop Project for their inspiration. The aim of this project is to produce attractive, scalable icons that work on multiple desktop environments. It's a great idea that deserves to succeed. Find out more about Tango here:

<http://tango.freedesktop.org>.

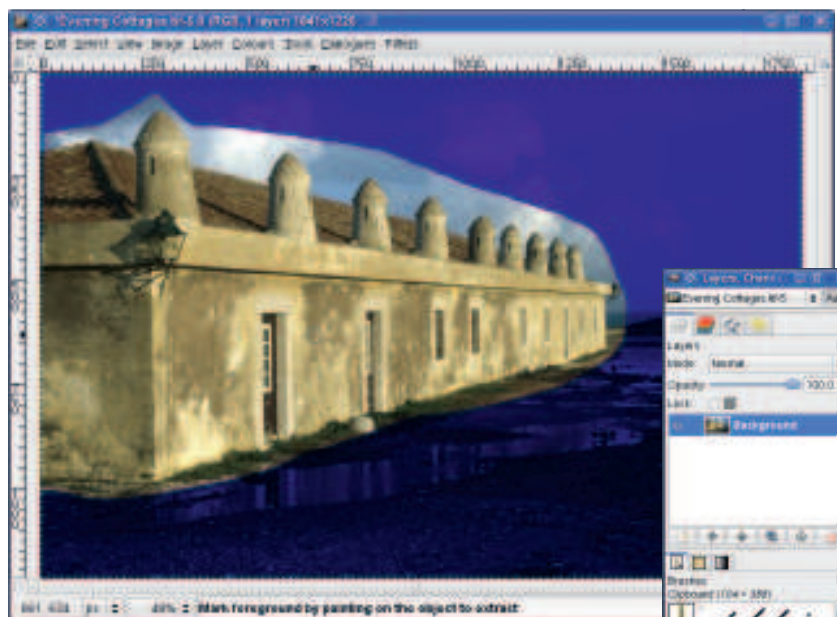
Cute icons don't help you get the job done but the new selection tools can make a big difference. Acknowledging that the selection tools were awkward to master the developers rewrite them and they are now hugely improved. Previously, if you selected an area it was difficult to change the size of the selection or reposition it. You could find yourself dragging a chunk of your image across the screen, leaving a gaping hole where it used to be.

The new selection tools are much more intuitive. You can now easily reposition and resize selections by using the handles that appear at the edges of the selection.

There are some new ways to select, too. The rectangle tool has acquired an option to create rounded corners which will appeal to web developers but the star is the foreground selection tool. This multi-step process guides you through selecting discrete objects from an image more easily than the previous tools. First, you draw a rough outline around the area of interest and then paint around the inside the object. A blue mask helps you identify and refine the selected area. When the mask is correct, press Enter to complete the process. It's not perfect but for many jobs, it's easier than the earlier options.

## Step-by-step guides

Multi-step processes are easier to navigate now with the help of hints in the status bar – and these guide you through using the revised tools. A good example is the Crop tool. This used to be one of *Gimp*'s most irritating tools because it popped a dialog box on top of where you were trying to work. You had to move the box out of the



» New foreground selection tool guides users with hints in the status bar; clipboard images are instantly available as brushes.

way before you could continue. However, it had a button labelled 'crop' so you knew how to complete the job. Crop is now more discrete and much faster to use. You drag over the area and then press Enter or simply click inside the crop region to complete. It simply doesn't get any easier than that, but without the hint in the status bar, you might be stuck for what to do next because the dialog box and its Crop button are gone.

It's a mystery why this same clean logic hasn't been applied to other tools. The Scale tool, for example, could have adopted the new approach but it's unchanged, with a pop-up dialog when you start using it.

The lack of colour management has prevented *Gimp* being taken seriously by many for professional work. The varying colour properties of devices can produce unwanted colour changes which can ruin prints. Colour management has now arrived. *Gimp 2.4* now understands and respects the colour profiles of devices and even has a print simulation mode so you can see how the image should look when you print it. This single enhancement makes *Gimp* a serious contender for a wider range of professional work.

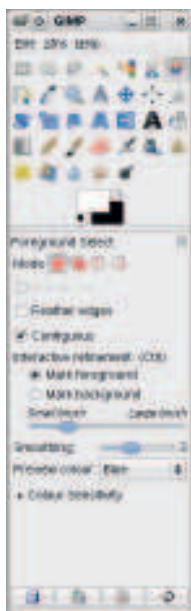
## Excellent printing

Printing in general as been overhauled and in our simple test produced excellent results on a previously unsupported printer,

an Epson Stylus Photo R800. *Gimp*'s printer support is now determined by the drivers available on the host system instead of using its own set of drivers. This is a very welcome and long overdue change.

With the new look and features – including many we haven't mentioned – you might have thought the Help files would have been revised but sadly not. They show the old look and have no mention of the new tools and features. This isn't the way to win new users. Existing users of *Gimp* will love the new features, if you've been avoiding *Gimp* because you found it lacking, now's the time to reconsider. **LXF**

» The new icon themes help *Gimp* look at home in all environments.



**LINUX** **Verdict**  
FORMAT

**Gimp 2.4**  
**Developer:** The Gimp Team  
**Web:** www.gimp.org  
**Price:** Free under GPL

<b>Features</b>	9/10
<b>Performance</b>	9/10
<b>Ease of use</b>	8/10
<b>Documentation</b>	4/10

» With properly revised docs, this would probably be worthy of a Top Stuff award.

**Rating 7/10**