# Compiz: Ubuntu Desktop's little known best friend

2018-12-05

The default GNOME desktop in Ubuntu is functional, but also pretty unfulfilling.

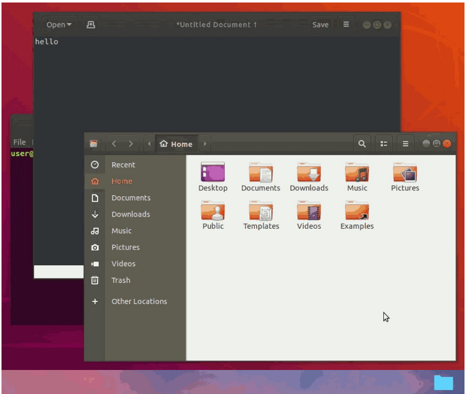
Activities
Tue 12:41
Trash

**TL;DR** Compiz can quickly get you the desktop you deserve: a desktop with a *very* high degree of customizability, on top of being faster than the default GNOME Shell, and (as far as I can tell) faster than Mac or Windows.

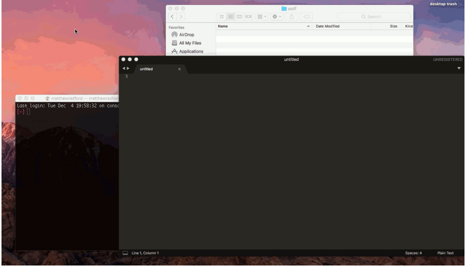
The best part is that it takes no time at all to get up and running! I'll show you how to transform Ubuntu into a desktop that is functionally similar to Mac.

## Some examples

### Mission Control / Scale


Open
*Untitled Document 1
Save
File
user@
Home
Recent
Home
Documents
Downloads
Music
Pictures
Videos
Trash
Other Locations
Desktop
Documents
Downloads
Music
Pictures
Public
Templates
Videos
Examples

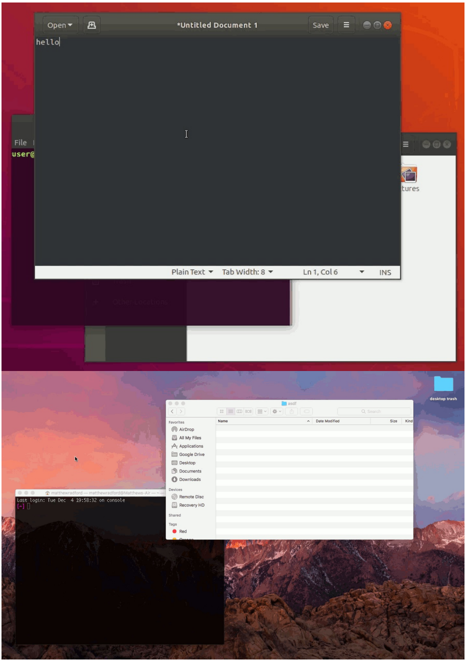
```
hello
```



asdf
Favorites
AirDrop
All My Files
Applications
Name
Date Modified
Size
Kind
untitled
UNREGISTERED
desktop trash
Line 1, Column 1
Spaces: 4
Plain Text

```
Last login: Tue Dec  4 19:58:32 on conso
```

Virtual Desktops / Workspaces



Open
*Untitled Document 1
Save
File
user@
tures
Plain Text
Tab Width: 8
Ln 1, Col 6
INS
asdf
Favorites
AirDrop
All My Files
Applications
Google Drive
Desktop
Documents
Downloads
Devices
Remote Disc
Recovery HD
Shared
Tags
Red
desktop trash

```
hello
```

```
Last login: Tue Dec  4 19:58:32 on console
```

If you’re a Mac user, then hopefully this guide shows you how easy it is to get *at least* the same amount of utility in Ubuntu as you do from Mac, if not more! And if you need a little push, check out the Mac frustrations that Ubuntu solves for me.

## Quick Install ❡

> This guide is targeted for 18.04, but will probably work for most other recent Ubuntu releases.

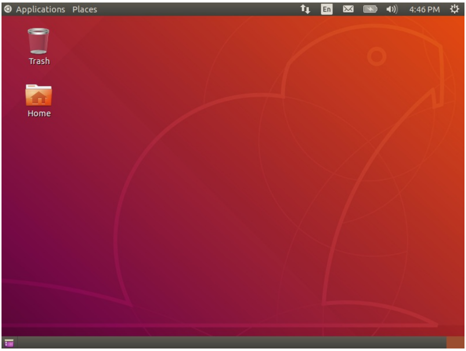
### Install compiz

```
sudo apt-get install gnome-session-flashback compiz compiz-core comp
```

### Switch to compiz desktop

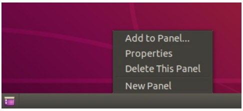
Log out of your user in GNOME, to get back to the user selection screen. Select your user. Before you enter your password, click on the options cog (`⚙`), and select `GNOME Flashback (Compiz)`. Then log in.

Welcome to your compiz desktop!


Applications
Places
En
4:46 PM
Trash
Home

### Dock / Toolbar Maintenance

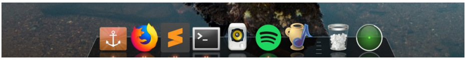
Toolbars (aka "panels") can be modified, auto-hidden, or deleted by holding down the Alt key and right clicking.


Add to Panel...
Properties
Delete This Panel
New Panel

Personally, I autohide the top toolbar and delete the bottom toolbar, giving you a 100% clutter free desktop. Then I replace the toolbar we deleted with Docky, a Mac-like dock (but feel free explore other dock software, I was also very happy with Cairo Dock for a couple years).

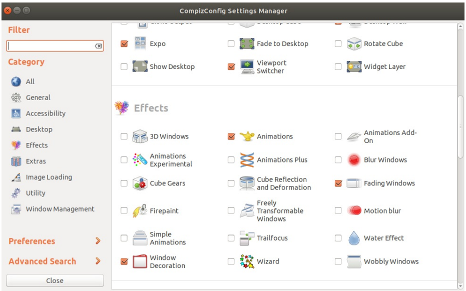
```
sudo apt-get install docky
```

If Docky doesn't launch automatically, go to the upper toolbar, `Applications -> Accessories -> Docky`.



## Compiz: A Guided Tour

In the upper toolbar go to `System Tools -> Preferences -> CompizConfig Settings Manager`.


CompizConfig Settings Manager
Filter
Category
All
General
Accessibility
Desktop
Effects
Extras
Image Loading
Utility
Window Management
Preferences
Advanced Search
Close
Effects

☑ Expo ☐ Fade to Desktop ☐ Rotate Cube
☐ Show Desktop ☑ Viewport Switcher ☐ Widget Layer

Effects

☐ 3D Windows ☑ Animations ☐ Animations Add-On
☐ Animations Experimental ☐ Animations Plus ☐ Blur Windows
☐ Cube Gears ☐ Cube Reflection and Deformation ☑ Fading Windows
☐ Firepaint ☐ Freely Transformable Windows ☐ Motion blur
☐ Simple Animations ☐ Trailfocus ☐ Water Effect
☑ Window Decoration ☐ Wizard ☐ Wobbly Windows

Here is where you can achieve nearly all the customization aspects of a desktop you could possibly want! Before we start I would encourage you to explore on your own and get a feel for all the minutiae available to you!

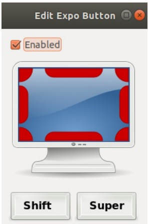
> Protip: If you change anything you didn't mean to, or want to revert, you can always click the tag `⌫` next to each field to reset to default. Handy!

> Note: Keep in mind that you're still in the GNOME desktop, so the core configuration items are still in the `System Settings...` area of Ubuntu.

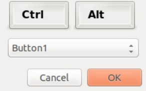
### Mouse Customization

When browsing the CCSM, note that if your mouse has more than 2 buttons, they are automatically availble to you for mapping. Buttons are numbered, so if you want to know which mouse button maps to which number, type `xev` on the command line and click inside of the window that pops up.

On top of that, every mouse button can be used in conjuction with a hot-corner.


Edit Expo Button
Shift
Super

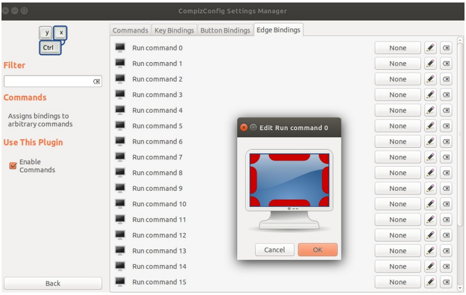
☑ Enabled


Ctrl
Alt
Button1
Cancel
OK

> Note: The mouse in Ubuntu is a free agent! The mouse will act on the window it is hovering over, rather than which window has focus. This means that common window actions, such as closing a window, can be triggered *anywhere inside of a window*, regardless of if I focus on the window. This is excellent for effortlessly closing windows that you stop caring about, and you won't have to think about clicking the dumb `x` in the corner.

### Commands

Here you can map any terminal action to keyboard shortcuts, mouse buttons, or hot-corners. Personally I add `gnome-terminal` as a command, and bind `Ctrl-Alt-t` to launch it.

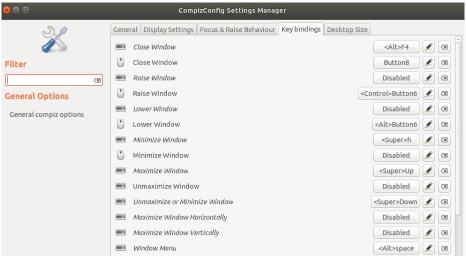

CompizConfig Settings Manager
y
x
Ctrl
Filter
Commands
Assigns bindings to arbitrary commands
Use This Plugin
☑ Enable Commands
Back
Commands
Key Bindings
Button Bindings
Edge Bindings
Edit Run command 0
Cancel
OK

Run command 0 None
Run command 1 None
Run command 2 None
Run command 3 None
Run command 4 None
Run command 5 None
Run command 6 None
Run command 7 None
Run command 8 None
Run command 9 None
Run command 10 None
Run command 11 None
Run command 12 None
Run command 13 None
Run command 14 None
Run command 15 None

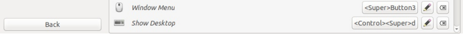
### General Options

Here you'll find basic keyboard, mouse, and hot-corner shortcuts for window managment, like closing or minimizing a window.

You can also define how many workspaces your desktop has, including 2D workspaces. I've experimented with vertical workspaces (see `Desktop Size`, `Vertical Virtual Size`), but end up sticking with just horizontal workspaces.


CompizConfig Settings Manager
Filter
General Options
General compiz options
General
Display Settings
Focus & Raise Behaviour
Key bindings
Desktop Size

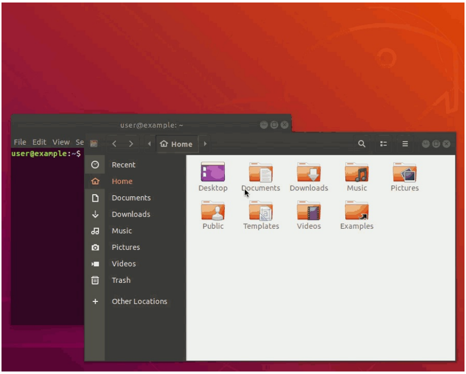
*Close Window* <Alt>F4
Close Window Button8
*Raise Window* Disabled
Raise Window <Control>Button6
*Lower Window* Disabled
Lower Window <Alt>Button6
*Minimize Window* <Super>h
Minimize Window Disabled
*Maximize Window* <Super>Up
Unmaximize Window Disabled
*Unmaximize or Minimize Window* <Super>Down
*Maximize Window Horizontally* Disabled
*Maximize Window Vertically* Disabled
*Window Menu* <Alt>space



| | |
|---|---|
| *Window Menu* | <Super>Button3 |
| *Show Desktop* | <Control><Super>d |

## Expo

A birds-eye view of your workspaces.

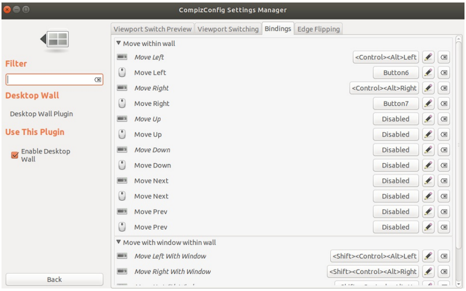


user@example: ~
File Edit View Se
user@example:~$
Home
Recent
Home
Documents
Downloads
Music
Pictures
Videos
Trash
Other Locations
Desktop
Documents
Downloads
Music
Pictures
Public
Templates
Videos
Examples

## Desktop Wall

Customize every aspect of your workspaces. Personally, I turn off all the animations, they make me impatient.

> Note: You can define how many workspaces you want in the `General Options` section



CompizConfig Settings Manager
Filter
Desktop Wall
Desktop Wall Plugin
Use This Plugin
Back
Viewport Switch Preview
Viewport Switching
Bindings
Edge Flipping

☑ Enable Desktop Wall

▼ Move within wall

| | |
|---|---|
| *Move Left* | <Control><Alt>Left |
| Move Left | Button6 |
| *Move Right* | <Control><Alt>Right |
| Move Right | Button7 |
| *Move Up* | Disabled |
| Move Up | Disabled |
| *Move Down* | Disabled |
| Move Down | Disabled |
| Move Next | Disabled |
| Move Next | Disabled |
| Move Prev | Disabled |
| Move Prev | Disabled |

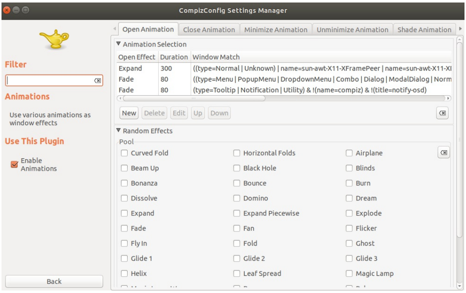
▼ Move with window within wall

| | |
|---|---|
| *Move Left With Window* | <Shift><Control><Alt>Left |
| *Move Right With Window* | <Shift><Control><Alt>Right |

## Animations

If eye-candy is your thing, prepare to sink some time into tweaking window animations! Toggle `Animations Add-Ons`, `Animations Plus`, and `Animations Experimental` to view even more animations (which will show up after rebooting, in the `Animations` category itself).

Apple's min/maximize animation is called `Magic Lamp` here if that's your thing.


CompizConfig Settings Manager
Open Animation
Close Animation
Minimize Animation
Unminimize Animation
Shade Animation
New
Delete
Edit
Up
Down
Back

Filter

Animations

Use various animations as window effects

Use This Plugin

☑ Enable Animations

Animation Selection

| Open Effect | Duration | Window Match |
|---|---|---|
| Expand | 300 | ((type=Normal \| Unknown) \| name=sun-awt-X11-XFramePeer \| name=sun-awt-X11-X |
| Fade | 80 | ((type=Menu \| PopupMenu \| DropdownMenu \| Combo \| Dialog \| ModalDialog \| Norm |
| Fade | 80 | (type=Tooltip \| Notification \| Utility) & !(name=compiz) & !(title=notify-osd) |

Random Effects

Pool

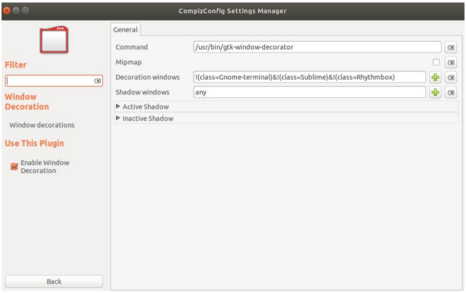
☐ Curved Fold
☐ Horizontal Folds
☐ Airplane
☐ Beam Up
☐ Black Hole
☐ Blinds
☐ Bonanza
☐ Bounce
☐ Burn
☐ Dissolve
☐ Domino
☐ Dream
☐ Expand
☐ Expand Piecewise
☐ Explode
☐ Fade
☐ Fan
☐ Flicker
☐ Fly In
☐ Fold
☐ Ghost
☐ Glide 1
☐ Glide 2
☐ Glide 3
☐ Helix
☐ Leaf Spread
☐ Magic Lamp

## Window Decoration

The bar on the top of every window with `x _ ☐` (exit, minimize, maximize) is sometimes wasted space, especially when you've mapped those actions to the mouse/keyboard! The good news it that we can get rid of them *on a per application basis.*

Under `Decoration windows`, you can replace `any` with the following format to prevent window decorations:

```
!(class=Gnome-terminal)&!(class=Sublime)&!(class=Rhythmbox)
```


CompizConfig Settings Manager
General
Back

Filter

Window Decoration

Window decorations

Use This Plugin

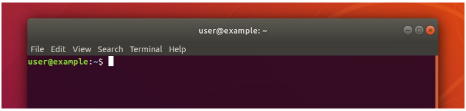
☑ Enable Window Decoration

Command: /usr/bin/gtk-window-decorator
Mipmap: ☐
Decoration windows: !(class=Gnome-terminal)&!(class=Sublime)&!(class=Rhythmbox)
Shadow windows: any

Active Shadow

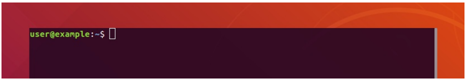
Inactive Shadow

**With**


user@example: ~
File
Edit
View
Search
Terminal
Help

```
user@example:~$ 
```

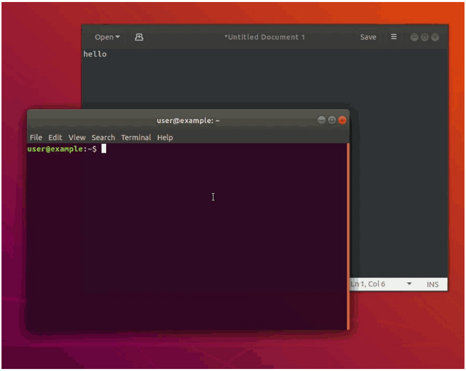
**Without**



```
user@example:~$ 
```

## Grid

This is like just like Spectacle for Mac, and something I personally couldn't live without.

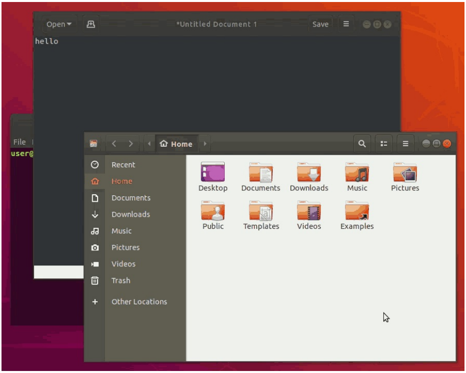

Open
*Untitled Document 1
Save
user@example: ~
File Edit View Search Terminal Help
Ln 1, Col 6
INS

```
hello
```

```
user@example:~$
```

### Scale

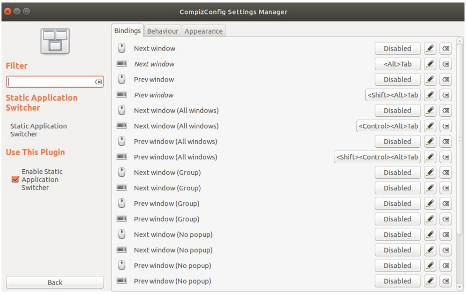
This is like the 3-finger swiping up on Mac, see all your open windows.


Open
*Untitled Document 1
Save
File
Home
Recent
Home
Documents
Downloads
Music
Pictures
Videos
Trash
Other Locations
Desktop
Documents
Downloads
Music
Pictures
Public
Templates
Videos
Examples

```
hello
```

### Application Switcher

There are several Application Switchers to choose from here, each varying in style and function, so try each one out. Personally I use the Static Application Switcher since it's the least intense.


CompizConfig Settings Manager
Filter
Bindings
Behaviour
Appearance
Back

**Static Application Switcher**

Static Application Switcher

**Use This Plugin**

☑ Enable Static Application Switcher

| | |
|---|---|
| Next window | Disabled |
| *Next window* | <Alt>Tab |
| Prev window | Disabled |
| *Prev window* | <Shift><Alt>Tab |
| Next window (All windows) | Disabled |
| Next window (All windows) | <Control><Alt>Tab |
| Prev window (All windows) | Disabled |
| Prev window (All windows) | <Shift><Control><Alt>Tab |
| Next window (Group) | Disabled |
| Next window (Group) | Disabled |
| Prev window (Group) | Disabled |
| Prev window (Group) | Disabled |
| Next window (No popup) | Disabled |
| Next window (No popup) | Disabled |
| Prev window (No popup) | Disabled |
| Prev window (No popup) | Disabled |

# Other Helpful Stuff

## Video Codecs and more

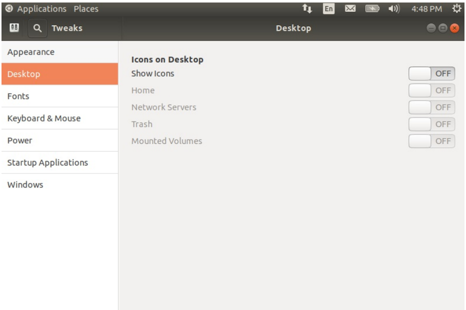
```
sudo apt-get install ubuntu-restricted-extras ubuntu-restricted-add
```

## Gnome Tweak

Gnome tweaks can help you out a bit with the GNOME related side of things. The only thing I use it for is to remove the desktop icons.

```
sudo apt-get install gnome-tweaks gnome-tweak-tool
```

You can open in `Applications -> System Tools -> Preferences -> Gnome Tweak`.


Applications
Places
En
4:48 PM
Tweaks
Desktop
Appearance
Desktop
Fonts
Keyboard & Mouse
Power
Startup Applications
Windows

**Icons on Desktop**

| | |
|---|---|
| Show Icons | OFF |
| Home | OFF |
| Network Servers | OFF |
| Trash | OFF |
| Mounted Volumes | OFF |

I make sure to hide any icons on the desktop.

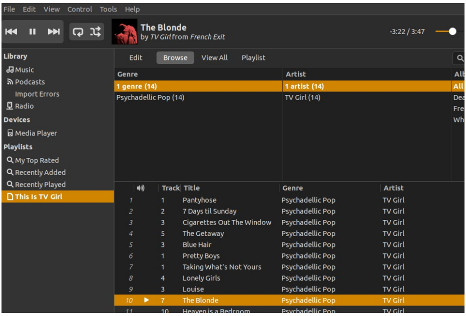
## Customize the theme of native applications

You can customize your entire theme, or even cherry-pick native applications to have a specific theme. Head over to gnome-look to browse themes. Download the theme and unzip it to `~/.themes` (e.g. `~/.themes/Macterial`).

You can use the Gnome Tweak described above to set a theme across the board. Or, to customize the theme of an individual native application, head into `~/.local/share/applications`. You'll see a bevy of native applications `.desktop` files. Open your respective application file (e.g. `rhythmbox.desktop`) and prefix the `Exec=` line with `env GTK_THEME=<name-of-theme>`. For example, if I want the `Macterial` theme, `Exec=rhythmbox %U` will become `Exec=env GTK_THEME=Macterial rhythmbox %U`. Re/start the application and enjoy.

> Note: You may have to reset shortcuts in your dock/toolbar/input-mapping, since it's possible that it was using the old version of the `.desktop` file. If you launch apps via the command line then obviously just add `env GTK_THEME=<name-of-theme>` before the command.

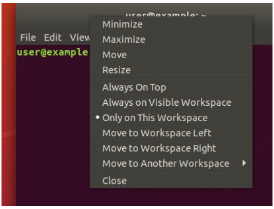
> Note: GTK3 themes are a lot like CSS files, if there's something a little off (like color preferences), you can probably adjust it easily!


File
Edit
View
Control
Tools
Help
The Blonde
by TV Girl from French Exit
-3:22 / 3:47
Library
Music
Podcasts
Import Errors
Radio
Devices
Media Player
Playlists
My Top Rated
Recently Added
Recently Played
This Is TV Girl
Edit
Browse
View All
Playlist
Genre
1 genre (14)
Psychadellic Pop (14)
Artist
1 artist (14)
TV Girl (14)
All
All
Dea
Fre
Wh

|  |  | Track | Title | Genre | Artist |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | 1 | Pantyhose | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 2 |  | 2 | 7 Days til Sunday | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 3 |  | 3 | Cigarettes Out The Window | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 4 |  | 5 | The Getaway | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 5 |  | 3 | Blue Hair | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 6 |  | 1 | Pretty Boys | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 7 |  | 1 | Taking What's Not Yours | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 8 |  | 4 | Lonely Girls | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 9 |  | 3 | Louise | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 10 | ▶ | 7 | The Blonde | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |
| 11 |  | 10 | Heaven is a Bedroom | Psychadellic Pop | TV Girl |

### Sticky Windows

Windows can "sticky", which means they will persist across all workspaces. They can also always-be-on-top regardless of window focus.


user@example: ~
File
Edit
View
user@example
Minimize
Maximize
Move
Resize
Always On Top
Always on Visible Workspace
• Only on This Workspace
Move to Workspace Left
Move to Workspace Right
Move to Another Workspace
Close

Handy for terminals, music players, video players, chat programs, and other passive applications that require infrequent focus.

> Tip: Try combining this with the Opacity plugin!

## That's all

There you have it, the compiz enhanced Ubuntu desktop! Hopefully it has piqued your interest!

ubuntu compiz

ubuntu ubuntu desktop installation guide customization compiz