



Use CSSEdit to test how your changes affect a website's design

If you want to experiment with a website's design, CSSEdit provides a way to do it without you having to host and run a copy of the site. Here's how.

Back in the (very) old days, websites were simple: HTML files and the odd image were all you had to worry about. Today, websites are complex beasts, often with teams of people working on various components, and it's common for pages to be rendered dynamically in the browser.

If you're a designer whose responsibility is primarily visual design, CSSEdit is a quick way of testing how CSS changes affect a site's appearance. Instead of you having to host and run a local copy of a website, you can use CSSEdit to use local style sheets to override those on the live site purely for your own testing purposes. (The site itself remains unchanged; only your view of it within CSSEdit is updated as you amend the CSS.) For dynamic-driven monster websites, CSSEdit is an essential part of a designer's toolkit, but it's also handy for quickfire experimentation on things like

WordPress blogs, or even relatively simple static websites. For more on the application itself, visit macrabbit.com/cssedit.

In order to work through this tutorial, you'll need a basic understanding of CSS terminology and CSS rules. If you're not completely au fait with the terminology, `.foo` is a CSS class (note the period before the name); `#foo` is an ID (note the hash symbol); and rules comprise a selector (which defines to what page elements values should be assigned) and a declaration, which takes the form of property/value pairs within curly brackets. So a full rule might be `#content {background-color: #ffffff;}`, where `#content` is the selector (meaning the values will be assigned to the page element with the ID value of content), and the declaration contains a single rule, where the background colour is set to `#ffffff` (hex for white).

'Instead of having to host and run a local copy, you can use CSSEdit to override styles on the live site'

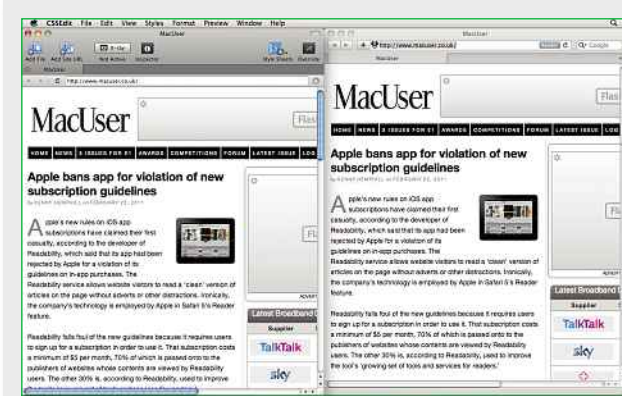


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Kit required CSSEdit



The screenshot displays the CSSEdit application interface. The main window shows a preview of the MacUser website with an 'Applied Styles' panel overlaid. The 'Style Name' search field is set to 'Style Name'. The 'Styles' list on the right includes '#sidebar h3' and '#side...bar h3'. The 'extracted-custom.css' file is open, showing CSS code for various elements like #subscriptionBox, .custom .teaser, and .menu li a.



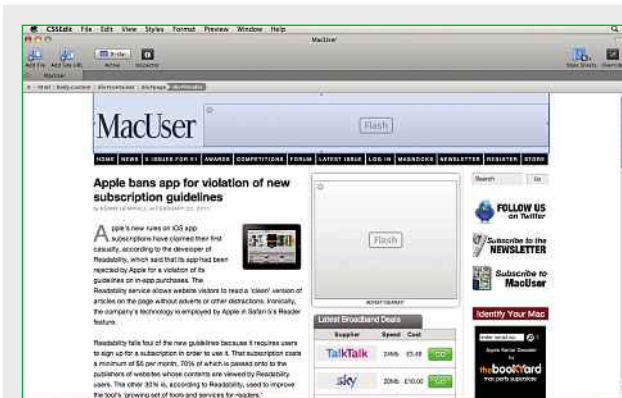
1. Load a site

To get started, open CSSEdit's Live Preview by going to Preview > Show Live Web Preview. You can then click Add Site URL and type the URL of the site on which you want to work into the address field, or you can just drag across a site from Safari. In this example, we're using macuser.co.uk.



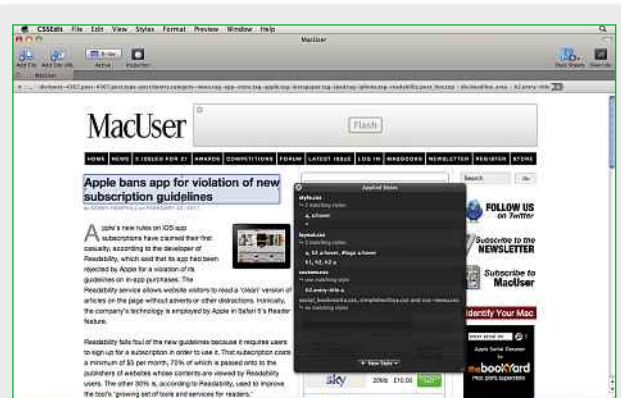
2. Browse the site

In its default state, the preview works like a typical web browser. You can browse the site as normal (and it'll block Flash if you've ClickToFlash installed) and if you want to see how your CSS changes affect a number of pages, you can add further tabs by following the process outlined in the previous step.



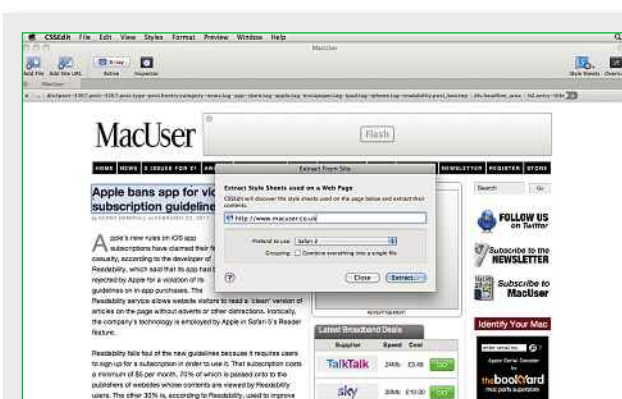
3. Use X-ray mode

Click the X-ray button and CSSEdit moves into X-ray mode. Click on a page element to highlight it. Dotted lines within the boundary denote padding applied to the element; arrows outside the element denote margins. In place of the address bar, you'll also see the hierarchical path to the currently selected element.



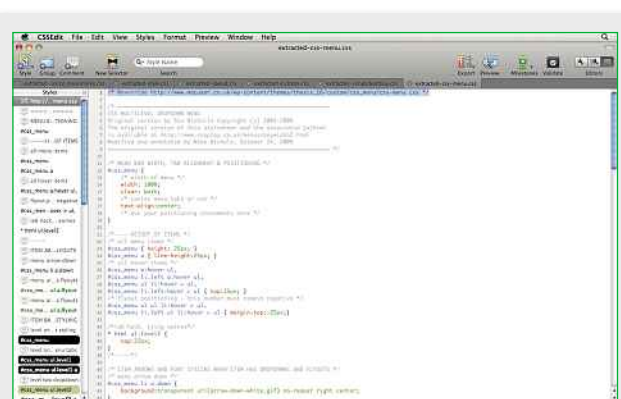
4. View associated styles

Click Inspector to view the Applied Styles palette. This shows styles associated with the selected element and also the style sheets where these styles are defined. For example, click a MacUser article heading and you'll see its appearance is driven by a number of CSS rules housed within three different style sheets.



5. Download style sheets

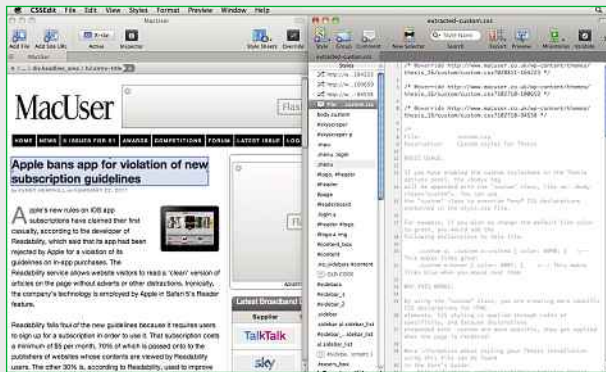
You could download a site's style sheets by selecting each of them from the Style Sheets menu. However, it's quicker to go to File > Extract From Site (Cmd-U), type in the site's URL and have CSSEdit grab the lot. They will open in a new tabbed window, with 'extracted' added before their original filenames.



6. Explore your style sheets

At the top of each style sheet, you'll see a CSS comment with @override and a URL to the location from which the file was extracted. This enables CSSEdit to use the local style sheet to override the live site in its preview window, which means you can make local edits and see how they affect the website without changing the site's live files.





7. Make some changes

MacUser's site is based around a template that utilises several style sheets, but on exploring them, most are considered locked defaults and changes should be made only to custom.css, so close all the files bar extracted-custom.css. First, we're going to create a rule that can be used to hide content.



8. Add a comment

Scroll to the bottom of the document and add a new comment: `/* patches */`. Under this, you can add temporary or new rules. We're now going to hide two sets of adverts in the site's central column. Turn on X-ray and select the top ad's container. You'll see 'div.mpu' highlighted in the path, meaning it has a class value of div.mpu.



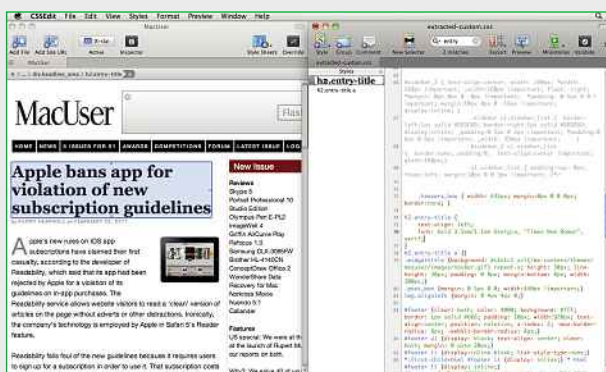
9. Hide some content

Select the deals section and you'll see it's housed in a div with an ID value of `bestBuyWidget300x400`. Click the patches comment and create a new rule using Styles > New Style. Define the selector as `.mpu, #bestBuyWidget300x400`. Within the curly brackets, add `display: none;`. CSSEdit's live preview will no longer show the ads.



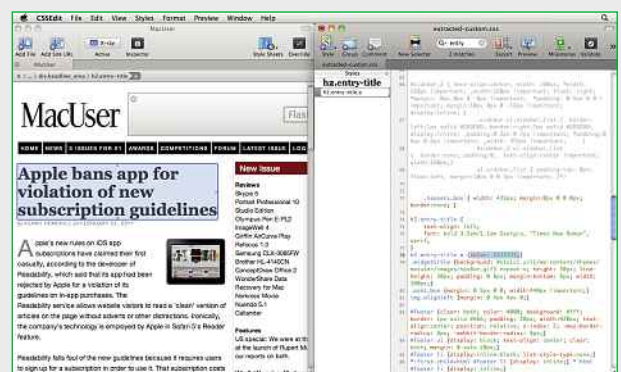
10. Find a rule

Next, we'll update the article headings, set in Helvetica Neue. Select one in X-ray mode and you'll see the headings are `h2` elements with a class value of `entry-title` and are also links (that is, `a` elements). To find the right rule in the document, type `entry` into the search field, then select `h2.entry-title` from the sidebar.



11. Update a font style

Change the value of font to `bold 3.5em/1.1em Georgia, "Times New Roman", serif`. This makes the headings larger, tightens their leading from the loose default value and switches the font stack from sans-serif to serif. Again, on making each change, you'll see the site update in the live preview.



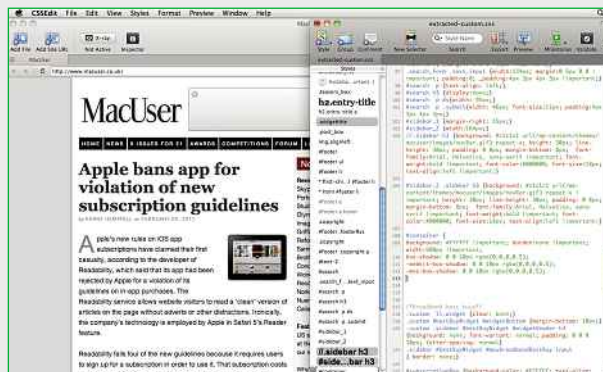
12. Change a font colour

With standard text, you could add a `color` property/value pair to change its colour, but that won't work here, as MacUser headings are also links. However, you should see `h2.entry-title` in the sidebar. This signifies a link within headings with a class of `entry-title`. Set `color: #333333;` for the rule's declaration.



13. Edit the background

You can use CSSEdit to experiment with page layout. We'll add a shadow behind the site's container. In the `body.custom` rule, change the background-color value to `#d4d4d4`. The background will turn light grey. In X-ray, select the edge of the page; the page's container is a div with the ID value `container`.



14. Amend the container

Find the `#container` rule. Delete the padding property/value pair, change the background to `#ffffff`. Add `box-shadow: 0 0 10px rgba(0,0,0,0.5)`; then two more identical pairs, but with the selectors `-webkit-box-shadow` and `-moz-box-shadow`. This applies a drop shadow behind the container.



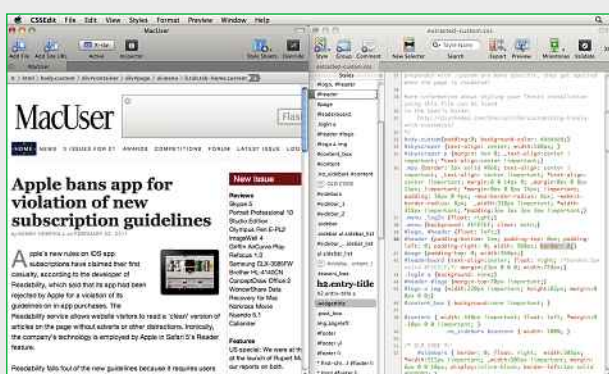
15. Create some new rules

Our last change will be to the navigation menu, which you'll discover in X-ray is an unordered list (`ul`) with a class value of `menu`. Find `.menu li a` in the CSS (the only rule relating to the navigation menu) and under it create new rules for `ul .menu`, `ul .menu a` and `ul .menu .current a`.



16. Edit the navigation menu

For the declaration for `ul .menu`, add the pairs `background-color: #ffffff`; to turn the background white, `padding-bottom: 10px`; to add padding under the navigation items, `border-bottom: 1px dotted #d4d4d4`; to add a subtle horizontal rule under the navigation, and `margin-bottom: 10px`; to add a margin beneath the rule.



17. Edit the menu items

The `ul .menu a` selector refers to links within the navigation menu, which are white text on black on the live site. To switch this, add the pairs `background-color: #ffffff`; and `color: #000000`; to the rule's declaration. This makes apparent the header div's underline, so find the `#header` rule and add `border: 0`; to its declaration.



18. Highlight the current section

X-ray the current section's navigation link and you'll see its containing list item (`li`) has a class value of `current`; hence values applied to `ul .menu .current a` will style it. Use `background-color: #d4d4d4`; and `color: #000000`; to apply a grey background to this style, then save your work. On a real project, you'd then replace the CSS on the live site.