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Review: Apple Vision Pro

The Vision Pro is a big leap for spatial computing in an unfriendly package.



PHOTOGRAPH: JULIAN CHOKKATTU



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Rating: 5/10 ⓘ

WIRED

Futuristic. Eye-tracking and gesture controls are impressive. The micro-OLED displays are exquisite and immersive. I love having multiple virtual screens around me.

TIRED

Heavy. Expensive. Isolating. Buggy.

BY NOW, YOU have likely read a great deal about the experience of using Apple's Vision Pro mixed-reality headset, which the company is positioning as the future of computing. There have been countless unboxings, teardowns, reviews, and even reports of damaged front screens. I encourage you to read my colleague Lauren Goode's excellent write-up about watching movies—and crying—with the headset on.

I've spent time with the Apple Vision Pro for almost a month now and dipped my toes into its many capabilities, from light gaming to late-night TV bingeing in bed. I even watched a 70-mm screening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in a theater and compared it to the experience in the Vision Pro to help determine the quality of the micro-OLED displays in Apple's headset. The optics are excellent, but Apple's technological prowess can't recreate the experience of watching the movie in an actual theater; the anxiety you feel from the Kubrickian dread pales to the physical effects of a theater's booming sound system and the build-up of electrified tension from fellow moviegoers.

My primary use for the Vision Pro has been work. It's the device's spatial computing features that appeal to me the most. After all, I'm the kind of guy to bring a portable monitor with me if I'm going to work out of a coffee shop. I love extra screens! The idea of a singular device that can replicate my at-home workstation and add multiple virtual screens, wherever I am, excited me the most.

My virtual office. PHOTOGRAPH: JULIAN CHOKKATTU

But just the other day, after taking what felt like twice the amount of time I'd typically need to finish a task, only to have Safari freeze and refuse to let me move the virtual browser windows back to their original position, I peeled off the headset and said out loud, "I can't do this."

I also can't get this quote from Steve Jobs out of my head as I've had the Vision Pro in my periphery over the last few weeks: "You've got to start with the customer experience and work backward to the technology. You can't start with the technology and try to figure out where you're going to try and sell it." The Vision Pro feels like Apple did exactly that—it started with a fantastic piece of technology and is now trying to figure out a way to market it.

Tunnel Vision

My flight to Barcelona a few weeks ago to cover the Mobile World Congress was a perfect time to test the Vision Pro's capabilities for work. I mustered up the courage to don the headset in public—I'm thankful no one was seated next to me on the plane—and I placed Apple's Magic Keyboard and Magic Trackpad on the tray table. Why Apple didn't bother to make a custom keyboard and mouse combo for the Vision Pro (that didn't also use Lightning for charging) boggles my mind.

The Vision Pro comes with an external battery pack. PHOTOGRAPH: JULIAN CHOKKATTU

I got incredibly frustrated the first few minutes in the air. The Vision Pro needs to go into Travel Mode when you're in a plane (or even a train), otherwise, the sensors get confused and it doesn't know where to place virtual apps in the space you're in because you're moving so fast. The headset is supposed to automatically detect when you're flying and offer a prompt to turn it on, but it didn't for me. So it became a game of trying to move through the interface fast enough to get to the Control Center and turn it on before everything disappeared and I got the "tracking failed" notification. It took me about 10 tries, but I finally did it. I felt like Tom Cruise in Edge of Tomorrow, learning from my past mistakes each time my world restarted.

With Travel Mode on, I was ready. I paid for in-flight Wi-Fi and connected the Vision Pro. I plugged in the battery pack to the under-seat outlet for continuous power so I

didn't have to worry about the headset's paltry two-hour run time. I didn't turn on an “Environment” to block out the world around me because I didn't want to ignore the cabin attendants in case they came around. In the Vision Pro, I had one Safari browser front and center with multiple tabs, and I had another one off to the left to use for research and reference. On the right, I had Slack and Telegram so I could keep an eye on work and personal messages.

As a 6'4" guy, I have wide shoulders and typically find it nearly impossible to write on a laptop in an airplane seat. It's just too cramped. But there I was, typing a nearly 2,000-word story on the Vision Pro. Seeing all those virtual screens without taking up much space was amazing.

The problem? All of my virtual apps had a slight jitter to them, almost like they were vibrating in place, which wasn't great. I had the Apple Notes app off to the side so I could add any stream-of-consciousness thoughts about my Vision Pro experience, and if you read it in succession, it kind of feels like lab notes you'd find in a video game right before the person who wrote it was killed by some technological invention. “Stress on temple. Neck is hurting. Just kinda wanna take it off.”

That was after roughly two hours in the Vision Pro. The weight of the headset was starting to wear down on me, but I persisted for a total of five hours. I was also annoyed that, periodically, all the virtual screens would disappear, and I had to reopen and place all of the apps in their respective positions. Worse yet, at around the two-hour mark, visionOS stopped working—the cursor disappeared and eye tracking wasn't registering anything. The only fix was to disconnect the power and reconnect it. I noticed the headset was very hot (I didn't feel the heat on my face), and I've been able to replicate the experience where the interface gets stuttery and locks up after prolonged use.

I have since continued to work periodically in the Vision Pro after coming back from Barcelona. One continuous point of frustration is the eye tracking. It's such an impressive feature, but there are so many moments when I'm looking at an icon or the keys on the virtual keyboard and visionOS thinks I am looking at the key just to the right of what I'm actually staring at. Cue a game of me trying to stare harder at the object and even tilting my head a bit to see if that helps (it weirdly does). If I stared any harder I think I'd unlock telepathy.

There's a feature called Mac Virtual Display that lets you bring your MacBook's screen into the virtual space, and then you can add other visionOS apps and windows around it. It's super cool in theory, but because you can't interact with the MacBook screen with your fingers, the floating display feels disjointed in the otherwise completely interactive environment. I didn't end up using it much.

In general, I feel a little slower when I work in the Vision Pro. A part of this is the iPadOS-esque cursor that just doesn't feel as precise and functional as a standard cursor on macOS or Windows. I also don't like how much I have to move my head around to look at all these virtual screens. Typically, with my ultrawide monitor and vertical monitor setup, a simple glance is all I need to see the other screen. But on the Vision Pro with several apps open, my head is on a constant swivel. Pushing the apps further back within the virtual space helps but doesn't solve this problem.

The finger gesture that doubles as a mouse click is smart and largely works well, but there are times when the Vision Pro thinks my fingers are making this gesture when I'm typing, causing the whole browser window to scroll up and down. Speaking of, if you put your hands on your lap while watching a movie, they just stay present even when you dial the environment around you to block out the world. It was weird watching a show and seeing my hands flickering at the bottom of the screen.

Future Shock

The biggest problem with the Vision Pro is that you have to put it on your head. My friend likened it to having a gym that's only a block or two away. I *know* it's right there, but I can't motivate myself enough to make the short trip. On the rare occasions that I do, I have a pleasant time. Similarly, every first thought about the Vision Pro is, "Oh but I have to put it on." This barrier is enough for me to just forgo the headset and use my computer. That's without mentioning having to deal with the wire and battery pack when you move around.

PHOTOGRAPH: JULIAN CHOKKATTU

Worse is when the doorbell goes off while you're in the Vision Pro and you have to suddenly take it off to run downstairs and answer the door. Contrary to what Apple

might want, I find it odd to just keep wearing the headset as I move through my home.

Just the other day I was installing a smart thermostat and I thought it would be helpful to wear the headset and place the installation's video walkthrough in a virtual space next to the thermostat so I didn't have to keep going back to my phone. Then I thought about having to wear the Vision Pro and look through the passthrough screen, which sometimes resembles a 720p display. Oh and the fact that there's no official YouTube app yet (there is a third-party option). I just watched the video on my phone instead.

My wife doesn't like it when I'm wearing the Vision Pro. She says it makes me “very unapproachable,” and even though Apple has a feature called EyeSight that simulates your eyes on the exterior screen of the headset, she says it's difficult to notice it. When she does, “It feels like I'm looking at your eyes through a screensaver.” I might be enjoying my time in the headset, but it's isolating for her.

I can go on and on. It's surprisingly bulky to stuff in a backpack, not to mention the travel case Apple sells is \$199 and adds even more bulk. It's silly that the Zeiss prescription inserts cost so much, and that there's no way to set up a second user's profile in case someone else in the household wants to use it. (There's just a rudimentary guest mode.) I also don't love the faint glare on the lens that seems to only appear when you're watching a movie or show in a dark setting.

PHOTOGRAPH: JULIAN CHOKKATTU

Most of all, I'm not sure about how Apple is positioning the Vision Pro. Should the future of computing be a bulky headset strapped to our heads that isolates us from the real world? Should I walk around my home capturing spatial video of my dog all the time? Or have conversations with my wife as she stares at my digital eyes? I am sure a loyal Apple and VR fanbase is loving every minute inside the Vision Pro, but I fear the simplest barrier of having to wear a bulky thing on the head is enough to put off the vast majority of consumers.

Yes, the Vision Pro is very much a first-gen product and one that's not really intended for the general public—it's more like a public developer kit. Naturally, components will get smaller, the technology will improve, and hopefully, the price will go down. The hardware is monumental, and the capabilities of the Vision Pro are incredibly impressive. But I think we are quite a ways away from the future Apple is envisioning.

\$3,499 AT APPLE



Julian Chokkattu is a senior reviews editor at WIRED, and has been covering personal technology and reviewing consumer products for nearly a decade. He specializes in smartphones, tablets, and smartwatches, and covers augmented and virtual reality devices, office chairs, electric scooters, home office equipment, and more. Previously he was the... [Read more](#)

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