A Gorgeous Guide to the Earliest Computers

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Technology’s evolution of slim, sleek gadgery is directly proportional to our appreciation for the computing behemoths of yonder years. Sure, the new MacBook Pro is razor thin and beautifully beveled, but it’ll never fill the giant, rectangular hole in your heart left by the 25-pound Osborne 1—the world’s first truly portable computer.

It’s easy to believe the fallacy that early computers forwent form for function, but the Brutalist aesthetic of mid to late-century technology remains a testament to designers’ creativity in an era of challenging limitations. As much pieces of artwork as utilitarian devices, the assertive shapes of primitive computers seemed to indicate a forceful trajectory forward toward a golden age of computing. Even today, retro-futurism continues to enchant and inspire modern artists, and pull our imaginations back in time.

Now, for anyone waxing nostalgic over ancient mainframes and analog machines, London production studio INK has just released a gorgeous photo series called Guide to Computing that’ll make you want to trade your Chromebook for a Harwell Dekatron.

Through delicate retouching and post-production techniques, photographer James Ball (aka Docubyte) breathed new life into these aging historical artifacts. Displayed in a manner reminiscent of 1960s advertising, the Guide to Computing presents these devices as they might have been marketed during their heydays. A few of them even predated the advent of modern color photography.

Most of these machines have never been seen before in this context, so enjoy this spectacularly retro piece of early computing history.

http://motherboard.vice.com/read/a-gorgeous-guide-to-the-earliest-computers
Harwell Dekatron

The Harwell Dekatron, also known as the Wolverhampton Instrument for Teaching Computing from Harwell (WITCH), is an early British relay-based computer created in the 1950s. Weighing in at two-and-a-half tonnes, it is now working and on display at the National Museum of Computing. The Guinness Book of World Records recognised it as the world's oldest working digital computer for a second time in 2013.

Image: INK / Docubyte

Pilot ACE

The Pilot ACE was one of the first computers built in the United Kingdom at the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in the early 1950s. It was also one of the earliest stored-program computers, joining other UK designs like the Manchester Mark 1 and EDSAC of the same era. The design is one of the earliest general computers designed by Alan Turing, although he left NPL before it was completed. The Pilot ACE consists of 800 vacuum tubes able to perform floating point arithmetic necessary for scientific calculations.
EAI Pace (TR 48)

The EAI Pace is a "desktop computer" that was manufactured and produced in the early 1960's. TR48 was the most complete desktop analog computer available of its time, even finding its way into part of the Apollo moon program for simulation of test flight systems, and featured in the the Apollo Monthly Progress Report of 1962.
A small analog hybrid computer, the HDR75 was developed in the former DDR at the Technical University of Dresden (now known as The Center for Information Services and High Performance Computing).
IBM 1401

IBM 1401 is a variable word length decimal computer first produced in 1959. The first member of the highly successful IBM 1400 series, it was aimed at replacing tabulation machines equipment for processing data
stored on punched cards. Over 12,000 units were produced, with some nations using them into the 1980s.

**IBM 729**

The IBM 729 Magnetic Tape Unit was IBM's iconic tape mass storage system from the late 1950s through
the mid 1960s. Part of the IBM 7 track family of tape units, it used magnetic tape up to 2,400 feet long wound on reels up to 10.5 inches.
The ICL 7500 series are a range of terminals and workstations that were developed by the now defunct UK computing company, ICL, during the 1970s. Similar in size to a desk side or tower PC, the ICL 7500 machines were intended to function in an office environment. By the 1980s, highly specialized versions of these machines had the ability to run the latest available games of the time, such as PacMan and Space Invaders.
Control Data 6600

CDC 6600 was the flagship mainframe supercomputer of the 6000 series of computers manufactured by Control Data Corporation. The CDC 6600 is generally considered to be the first successful supercomputer, with performance of up to three megaFLOPS. It held the title of the world's fastest computer from 1964 to 1969.

Endim 2000

The ENDIM 2000 analog computer was a tube-based design developed and manufactured in the former German Democratic Republic. About 20 machines were produced. The surviving machine is now held at the Technische Sammlungen Dresden.
One of the last analogue hybrid computers to be built in the former Czechoslovakia was the Meda 42TA. It dates from the early 1970s, and found widespread use in many countries behind the Iron Curtain.