Customizing KDE with KDE-Look.org

With the help of KDE-Look.org, Jes Hall reveals her productivity secrets and explains how to add a little "tszujing" to KDE.

JES HALL

I'm sure KDE's ability to be customized almost infinitely is the reason I don't yet rule the world. If I could only take the time and energy that goes into hunting for the cutest wallpapers, downloading icon themes, installing mouse cursor sets—and channel it into study or work—I'm quite certain I'd be a star pupil or model employee. As it is, many days when I should be doing something more productive, I find myself time and time again visiting that themer's treasure trove, KDE-Look.org (http://www.kde-look.org).

The KDE Control Center puts a dazzling array of configuration options in one convenient location. In the Appearance & Themes section are the modules controlling all aspects of the look and feel of your KDE desktop. Here you can install and configure wallpapers, icon themes, color schemes and much more. KDE-Look.org provides a place for users to share the customizations they have made.

WALLPAPERS

With KDE 3.4 came Get Hot New Stuff, a simple way of downloading user-contributed data for applications. In addition to the selection of artwork that comes with a KDE installation, KDesktop makes use of this new technology to streamline searching for and installing new desktop wallpapers from KDE-Look.org. Open the KDesktop configuration dialog by right-clicking on the desktop and selecting Configure Desktop... from the context menu. The dialog that appears shows your current desktop background settings. Beneath the picture of the computer monitor on the right, click on Get New Wallpapers.

In the Get New Wallpapers dialog, click on any image thumbnail to see more detailed information for that image. Once you've found an image you want to download, simply click Install. The image is downloaded and installed. After exiting the Get New Wallpapers dialog, you can set your new image as the desktop background by selecting it from the Picture drop-down box in the KDesktop configuration dialog, under Background. If you already have an image saved to your hard disk that you'd like to set as the desktop
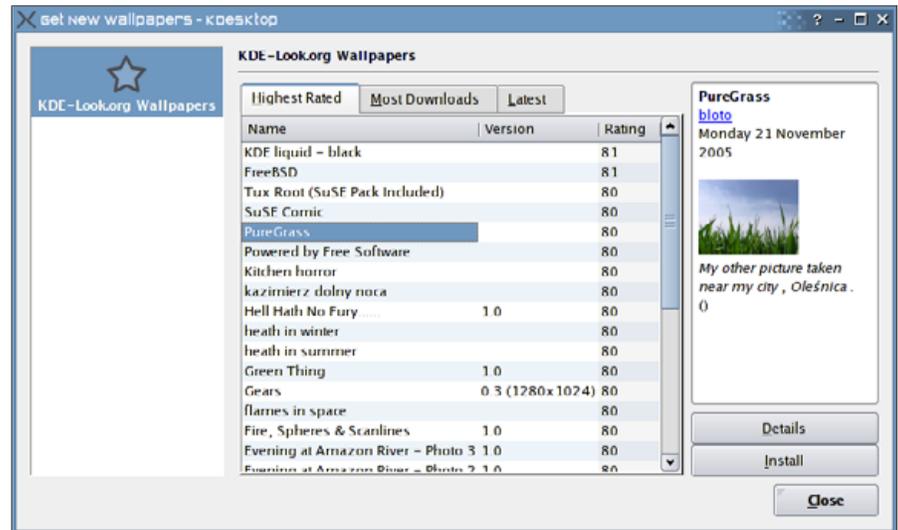

Figure 1. The Get New Wallpapers dialog

wallpaper, that's even easier. Simply navigate to where you've stored the image in Konqueror and drag and drop the image to the desktop. In the context menu that appears, select Set As Wallpaper.

ICON THEMES

Icon themes are a popular and striking way of changing the look of your KDE desktop. Download icon themes from the Icons section of KDE-Look.org. To install an icon theme you've downloaded, fire up the KDE Control Center. Under Appearance & Themes, select Icons. Click on Install new theme at the bottom of the dialog, and either navigate to the location
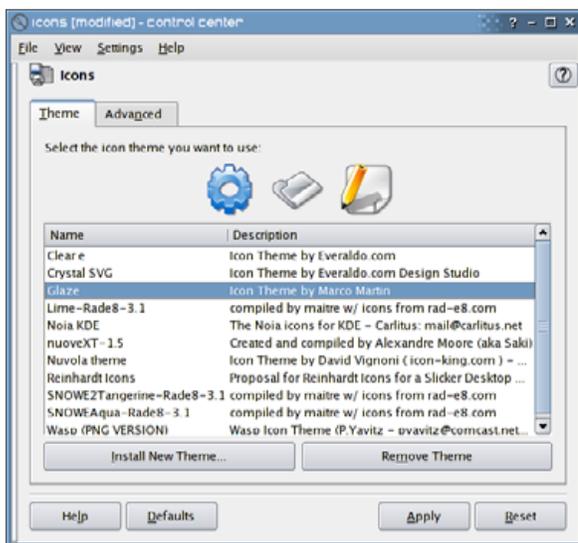
Figure 2. The Icons Dialog

where you downloaded the icon theme by clicking on the small folder icon to the right of the text field, or drag and drop the icon theme archive into the text field from a Konqueror window. Click OK, and KControl installs your theme. This step sometimes can take as much as half a minute, as a large number of small icon files are being extracted and copied to a new location. Once finished, you can load your new icon theme by highlighting its name in the list of installed themes and clicking Apply. Keep in mind that not all files listed on the KDE-Look.org icons section are complete themes able to be installed in this way. Carefully read the entry's description and any user comments to help distinguish which are complete themes and which not. Once you've installed the icon theme, you're free to delete the theme archive you downloaded.

COLOR SCHEMES

KDE comes with a wide variety of color schemes, and the colors section available at KControl→ Appearance & Themes allows you to select a scheme, modify existing schemes and install new schemes. To install a scheme you've downloaded from KDE-Look.org, click Import scheme. Navigate to where you have downloaded the scheme file or the archive containing it, and click OK. Your new color scheme is now selectable in the list of installed schemes. Once you've installed a color scheme, you can delete the color scheme file or archive you downloaded. You also can create your own personalized schemes by highlighting a scheme you'd like to modify and customizing the color values for various interface elements in the Widget Color drop-down box to the right.

Hint: the color preview image at the top of the dialog is clickable. To change the title bar color, you can click on the title bar in the preview image and then on the small color swatch underneath the Widget Color drop-down box that represents its current color value. This brings up the color chooser dialog where you can select a new color for this widget.

MOUSE CURSORS

There is a wide range of X11 mouse cursor themes available for download on KDE-Look.org, and KControl provides a nice interface for installing and applying mouse cursor themes, although it's pretty well hidden. To install a cursor theme you've downloaded, open KControl and go to Peripherals→Mouse. (Oh sure, I hear you say, that's just *so* logical.) The second tab—cursor theme—is where we manage our mouse cursor themes. Click Install new theme, and navigate to where you downloaded the mouse cursor theme
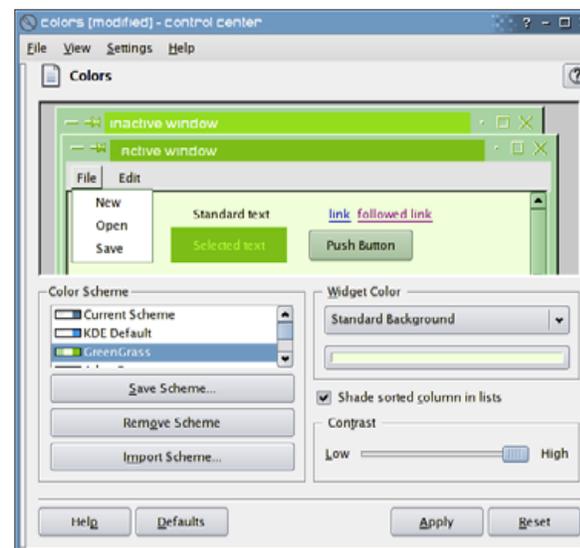

Figure 3. The Colors Dialog

archive. Once you've selected it, click OK. Select your new theme from the list of installed themes, and click apply. You'll need to restart KDE before these changes take effect. Once you've installed the mouse cursor theme, you can delete the archive you downloaded.

SPLASH SCREENS

A splash screen is the progress meter that appears when you log in to or start KDE. Generally, each distribution brands its KDE packages with its own artwork as the splash screen. To install a new one, once you've selected a splash screen you like from KDE-Look.org and downloaded it to disk, launch KControl and go to Appearance & Themes→Splash Screen. Click the Add button, and navigate to where you've downloaded the splash screen archive. Once you've selected the
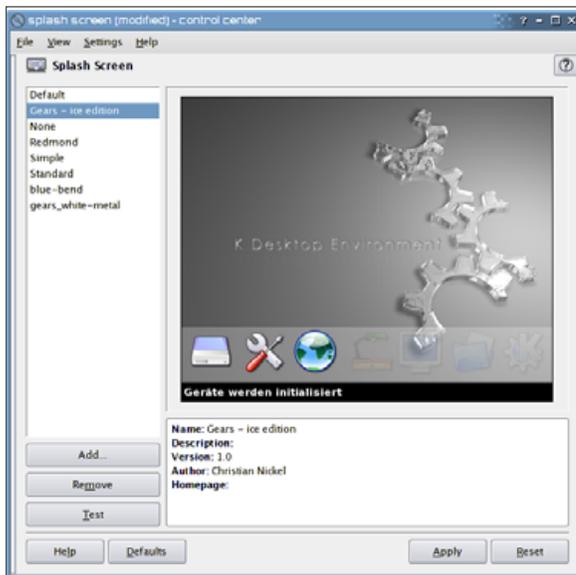
Figure 4. The Splash Screen Dialog

archive file, click OK. Your new splash screen should appear in the list of available splash screens. To see what it will look like without having to restart KDE, click Test. Once you've finished installing the splash screen, you can delete the archive you downloaded.

THEMES

Once you have your KDE desktop looking exactly how you like it, you can save the settings as a coherent theme in KControl➔Appearance & Themes➔Theme Manager. This lets you save groups of favorite settings and switch between them quickly and easily.

With KDE, your imagination is your only limit. Once you've created your masterpiece, you can share screenshots and discuss all aspects of
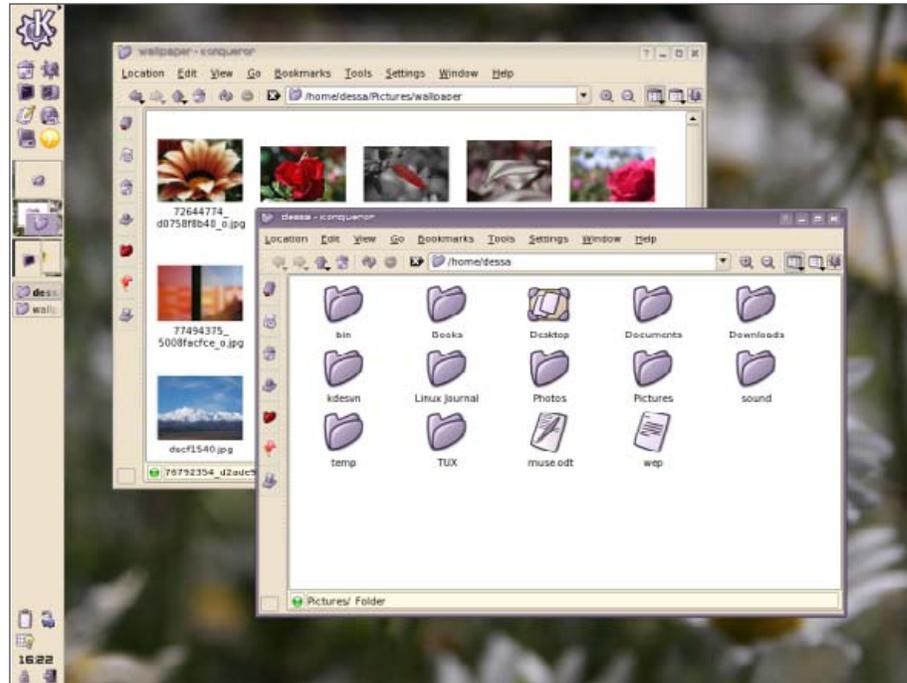

Figure 5. Share screenshots on KDE-Look.org to show off your customizations.

KDE's customization with other KDE themers by creating a free account on KDE-Look.org. You'll all have to excuse me now—I need to go make sure this article is handed in on time, or Kevin will know what to blame!■

Jes Hall is a UNIX systems consultant and KDE developer from New Zealand. She's passionate about helping open-source software bring life-changing information and tools to those who would otherwise not have them.

WHERE DOES KDE PUT MY THEMES ONCE I'VE INSTALLED THEM?

■ Icon themes: ~/.kde/share/icons
■ Color schemes: ~/.kde/share/apps/kdisplay/color-schemes
■ Splash screens: ~/.kde/share/apps/ksplash/Themes
■ Mouse cursors: ~/.icons
■ Wallpapers: ~/.kde/share/wallpapers