Design Philosophy for the Hatter Icon Theme



This document defines the visual rules and creative intent for Hatter, a unified GNOME icon theme that balances fidelity to original brand marks with a consistent, contemporary container-based system.
Form

Base template

1. Every icon starts from the same template for visual consistency.
2. Canvas and contour: each icon is 512×512 px with a rounded-square primary contour of 448×448 px and a corner radius of 104 px.
3. Shadowed contour: each main rounded-square contour carries a shadow to anchor the icon against varied backgrounds.



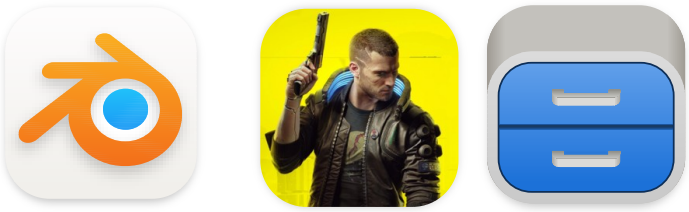
4.

Construction

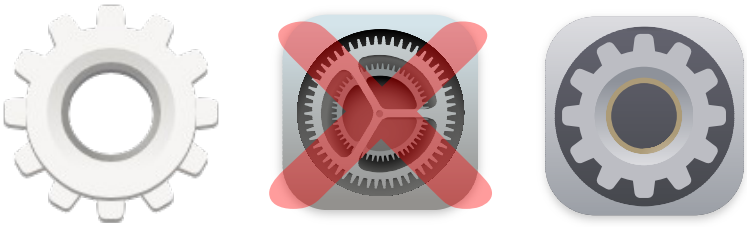
1. Three permitted treatments for original icons:



- Original on background — place the original icon (bitmap or vector) on a colored, white, or black background.
- Cut into contour — crop the original icon cleanly to the rounded-square contour.
- Deformed to contour — transform or adapt the original to fit the contour shape where necessary.

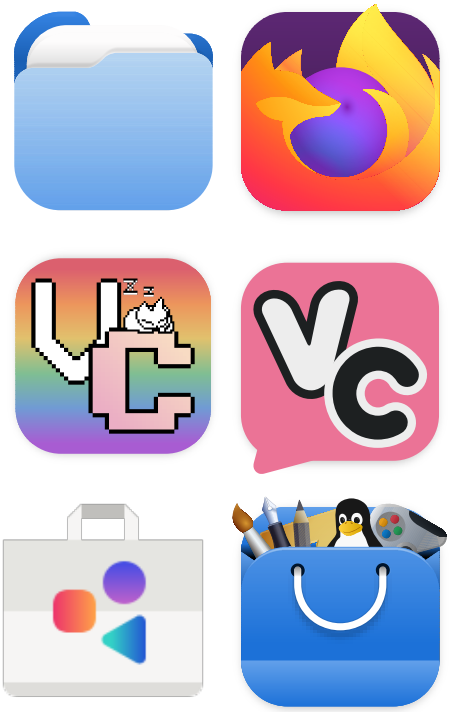


2. Use the original icon as the reference point in all cases so the mark remains recognizable.



Rules and Exceptions

1. Occasional, limited escape: shapes or elements may protrude beyond the rounded contour, but only sparingly and with purpose.
2. Cutouts allowed: the contour may include cut or negative spaces provided the implied primary contour remains identifiable.
3. Priority: icons for widely used applications receive the most refinement and attention to detail.
4. Respect redesigns: if an original icon has an updated official design, Hatter should attempt to adopt and adapt that new design rather than override it.
5. Rule flexibility: deviations from the guidelines are permitted when they improve recognition of the original design, enhance theme-wide consistency, or when the original icon intentionally references another theme's language.



Color, Gradients, and Shadow

1. Color foundation: the GNOME color palette is the cornerstone for color decisions.



2. Gradient steps: gradients generally span two palette shades (two steps apart).
3. Gradient direction: the default gradient runs vertically (light at top, darker at bottom).
4. Brand fidelity: keep the original icon or logo recognizable; preserve original colors whenever feasible.
5. White backgrounds: allowed but not as a lazy default—use deliberately.
6. Shadows: typically black with a blur radius of 25 px and opacity/density around 35%; shadows may be applied inside the contour to add perceived depth as well as beneath the contour.



Use of 3D Forms




1. Allowed for objects: 3D modeling or sculpted shading is acceptable when the icon depicts a physical object (e.g., cabinet, calculator, book).
2. Disallowed for abstracts: avoid 3D treatment for abstract marks (letters, logos, silhouettes).
3. Perspective: use a natural viewing angle. Do not adopt the frog-eye (exaggerated low) perspective used by Adwaita by default.







File Size and Efficiency

1. Keep file size minimal: aim for under 200 KB per icon; always under 500 KB.
2. Optimize assets and export settings while preserving visual fidelity.

Prioritization and Workflow Notes

1. Focus designer time on high-use and system-critical icons first.
2. Treat official updates to original icons as opportunities to refresh Hatter's versions while remaining faithful to the new mark.
3. This philosophy ensures Hatter remains coherent and modern while honoring original icon identities and GNOME visual language.