emelfm

Central Administration

What use is running XFree on older hardware if you have to resort to console applications in order to conserve resources? Lean solutions for X do exist. Read on to find out where to find them.

BY ANDREA MÜLLER

After reading the last two deskTOPias [1, 2] you might already have installed a lean desktop that suits your requirements. All you need now is a command center to match. We will be introducing the *emelfm* [3] file manager to conclude this mini-series on lean X Window systems.

With a powerful file manager you get a tool that will help you manage directories and allows you to perform actions that make sense for the file type in question, which is something that every desktop needs. Additional functions, such as an integrated command line are also quite useful. In contrast to "monster programs" such as Konqueror and Nautilus, *emelfm* has a small footprint of less than 300 KB, despite offering similar functionality.

Installation

If your distributor is not forthcoming with the *emelfm* packages, you may need to fire up your **compiler**. Before typing the following commands:

```
make
su
```

```
Enter root password
make install
```

To compile and install to */usr/local*, you may have to iron out a bug introduced by the Czech translator: the localization file *cs.po*, which resides in the *po* subdirectory within the *emlfm* sources, contains two syntax errors that cause *make* to abort. The easiest way to do this is to delete the file before compiling; users requiring Czech language support can use the file on the Subscription CD to replace *cs.po*.

Old Friends

Launching the file manager for the first time is like meeting an old friend. The two panel view with a command line at the bottom of the screen really reminds you of Midnight Commander (see Figure 1), with most of the function keys retaining the functions assigned to them in the popular original.

Pressing [F5] will copy and [F8] delete the selected file, for example. If you have never used *mc* before, you might like to type *keys* in the integrated command line. Incidentally, if you do not need access to the command line, clicking on the button to the left of the command line will hide it.

News

emelfm also provides a central shortcut bar that allows you to speed up common tasks by simply clicking to perform them. This is also where you add, copy or move directories, open the *emelfm* configuration menu (Figure 2), or terminate the application.

The command buttons to the right of the command line are a new feature with practicality in mind. The default configuration of *emelfm* tells you how much space the selected directory occupies (*du*), how much free space you have on your hard disk (*df*), and your main memory usage (*free*); it allows you to quickly open an *xterm* (*X*), or click on the *su* button, to execute a command at the superuser, *root*.

Both the *Bookmarks* and *Filters* menus can speed up your work. You can use *Bookmark / Add Bookmark* to add frequently accessed directories to your bookmark list, allowing to change directory quickly to these targets in future. *Filters* helps you keep track of what's going on by displaying only specific file types.

Navigation

You can either use the keyboard or the mouse to navigate your jungle of directories and files. With the mouse such navigation operations are reminiscent of other file managers.

Left clicking with the mouse will select files and directories, with the usual
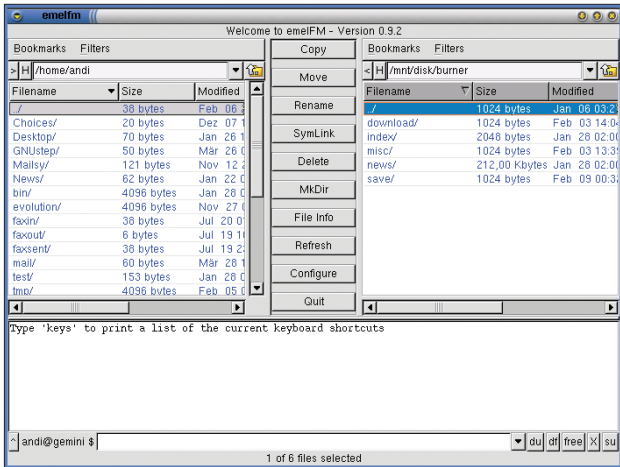
Figure 1: emelfm file manager default view

application of the [Ctrl] and/or [Shift] keys for multiple selections. A double-click moves up or down one level in the directory tree or performs some action for a selected file. The right mouse button opens a drop-down menu, and the center button performs drag-and-drop actions. There is no default behavior for the latter, so, after dragging and dropping a file you are prompted to choose whether to copy or move the selected file[s], or even creating a symbolic link which points to them.

Taken in Context

The drop-down menu provides far more possibilities for editing files and directories depending on the file type. An *Open* operation is defined for all files and either opens the selected file in an appropriate application, or if the file type has not yet been defined, a menu is displayed from which you can decide what to do with the file (Figure 3).

You can define a default application for a specific file type either in this menu or in the configuration menus. You can use the menu item *Create a filetype for this extension* to enter the application you want to use which will open the files with this specified extension in the future. This menu can also be accessed

by clicking on *Configure* in the center panel and selecting *Filetypes*. It is possible to define multiple applications for one file type, e.g. Netscape and *dillo* for HTML files.

If you define more than one program for displaying a file type you can specify the default application by clicking on *Set Default*. To open a file with a non-default program, simply select *Choose action* in the drop-down menu to view a list of applications linked to the current file extension. The drop-down menu also allows you to access other useful operations such as renaming, deleting and
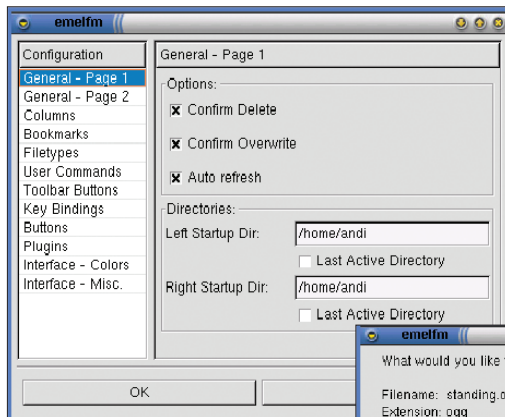

Figure 2: Using the menu to configure emelfm

modifying file permissions. The options at the bottom of the drop-menu are far more interesting.

User Commands and Plugins

The *User* menu item allows you to specify any number of so-called user commands. One such predefined command allows you to find out from which RPM package your selected file was originally installed from, *emelfm* uses an output window to return the results.

The *User Commands* option in the configuration menu allows you to define customized commands. If you select the *Find which RPM this came from* entry,

and then click on *Edit*, the command line syntax is displayed. Clicking on *Add* instead of *Edit* allows you to add new operations. For example, you could supply the following syntax to find out what file you have selected:

```
file %f
```

where *%f* refers to the selected file. Type a name for the new entry and click on *OK* to confirm to display the entry in the drop-down menu.

The *Plugins* menu item is slightly different. Plugins are compiled C programs that extend *emelfm*'s functionality. Some samples are supplied. If you have some experience of shell programming, you will soon get the grasp of the *For-Each* plugin which applies a command to all the selected files without requiring you to supply the correct syntax for a *for* loop.

To use this plugin, select the files you want to edit and then choose *Plugins / for each* in the drop-down menu. Type the command in the dialog box which then appears and *emelfm* will take care of the rest.

The *Rename Ext* plugin allows you to rename selected files based on a specific pattern, to change the *.html* file extension to *.htm*, for example.

The *Pack* plugin creates packed archives, allowing you to choose from various formats, such as *.tar.bz2* and *.zip*.

Again, the configuration menu is used to specify what plugins to display – you will need to open the *Plugins* section this time.

After defining operations for various file types and adding a selection of your favorite commands to the drop-down menu, you will soon begin to appreciate *emelfm*'s speed and convenience. ∎

Figure 3: Menu selection on opening an unknown file type

GLOSSARY

Compiler: *A program used to translate the source code of an application into machine code, thereby creating an executable.*

INFO

[1] Andrea Müller: "The icy fountain of youth", Linux Magazine, Issue 28, p84

[2] Andrea Müller: "Clickstart", Linux Magazine, Issue 29, p80

[3] *emelfm*-Homepage: http://emelfm.sourceforge.net/