Case: Sinclair ZX Spectrum

Tero Heikkinen/The University of the Arts Helsinki



Sinclair ZX Spectrum in 1982

A sequel to Sinclair ZX80, ZX81 (1Kb computers with no pixel graphics)

- 16K ROM and 48K RAM
- 256 x 192 pixel graphics
- 32 x 24 colour resolution
- 8 colours with two brightnesses (except for black)
- BASIC in 16K ROM as operating system

ZX Spectrum was a hit in UK, a widely known phenomenon and achieved moderate success in Europe.



Home computers at 1982

Late 1970s-early 1980s: Computers had broken through in industry, logistics and trade. Markets for a "home computer" products also emerged. Governments encouraged computer literacy and new industry/entrepreneurship.

- Early models like Apple II, Atari 800 expensive
- "Serious" computers (CP/M) even more expensive
- Cheap models Commodore Vic-20, Sinclair ZX81 were underpowered (1-4Kilobytes of memory)
- Colour graphics and sounds, but "multimedia" did not yet exist. (No CD-ROM, no sampled audio, no truecolor, no video)

		-
Sega SC-3000	Sinclair ZX Spectrum	Telmac TMC-600
1,295 mk	1395 mk	1495 mk
Dioital Systems	Oy Hedengren Ab	Telercas Oy, valr
90-632269	90-670211	90-248055
XSOA	280A	CDP1802
5K/16K	16K/16K	24K/9K
48/32K	48K	37K
64 näppäintä, 48 toim.näpp. runktionäppäinten avulla, kursorinäppäimet, kumi	40 näppäintä, 180 funktiota	76 näppäintä, nu päimistö, kirjoitu
Vari-ty 38 x 24	Väri-tv 38 x 24	Vári-tv 40×24
256 x 192 pistettä, sprite	256 x 176 pistettä. 192 pistettä konekieli	80 x 72 pistettä, puoligrafiikka
16 vāriā, sekoittamalla 210	8 vāriā	8 taustaa, 8 me
3 kpl + kohina/4 oktaavia	1 kpl/10 oktaavia	2 kpl + kohina/8
4-vārikirjoitinpiirturi, 2 peli- kahvaa, tulossa muita	Piirturikirjoitin, mikro- asema, nauhapohjainen massamuistiasema, usei- den muiden valmistajien oheislaitteita	Levyasema, mui tajien kirjoittime koneet, laajenne monitorit, nauhe

Tom Lean: *Electronic Dreams: How 1980s Britain learned to love the computer* (Bloomsbury Sigma, 2016)

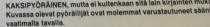
	8		1-1-		
Sega SC-3000	Sinclair ZX Spectrum	Telmac TMC-600 AS	Spectravideo SV-318	Canon X-07	
1295 mk Digital Systems	1395 mk Oy Hedengren Ab 90-670211	1495 mk Telercas Oy, valmistaja 90-248055	1980 mk Teknopiste Oy 90-480011	2380 mk Oy Canon Ab 90-558861	
90-632269 X80A 8K/16K 48/32K 64 näppäintä, 48 toim.näpp. funktionäppäinten avulla, kursorinäppäimet, kumi Väri-tv 38 x 24 256 x 192 pistettä, sprite 16 väriä, sekoittamalla 210 3 kpl + kohina/4 oktaavia	Z80A 16K/16K 48K 40 nappäintä, 180 funktiota Väri-tv 38 × 24 256 × 176 pistettä, 192 pistettä konekieli 8 väriä 1 kpl/10 oktaavia	CDP1802 24K/9K 37K 76 náppáintá, numeronáp- páimistó, kirjoituskone Vári-tv 40 × 24 80 × 72 pistettá, puoligrafiikka 8 taustaa, 8 merkkiváriá 2 kpl + kohina/8 oktaavia	Z80A 32K/32K 144K 71 näppäintä, kursori- ohjaussauva, 10 ohjelmoita- vaa näppäintä, naksu Vari-tv 24 × 40 64 × 48 pistettä, aksu 256 × 192 pistettä, sprite 16 väriä 3 kpl/8 oktaavia	NSC800 20K/8K 24K Nappäimistössä 6 ohjelmoi- tavaa ja 11 erikoisnäppäintä, naksu LCD-näyttö + musta-valko-tv 256 × 192 pist./mustavalko-tv, 120 × 32 pistettä/LCD 1 kpl/4 oktaavia 4- 4-värikirjoitinpiirturi, lämpö-	
4-värikirjoitinpiirturi, 2 peli- kahvaa, tulossa muita	Piirturikirjoitin, mikro- asema, nauhapohjainen massamuistiasema, usei- den muiden valmistajien oheislaitteita	Levyasema, muiden valmis- tajien kirjoittimet, kirjoitus- koneet, laajennusyksiköt, monitorit, nauhurit	Nauhuri, ohjaussauvat, laa jennusyksikköjä, kalvolevy asema + käyttöjärjestelmä piirtopöytä, kirjoitin + kort	 kirjoitin, optinen liitantä, muis tikortteja, muiden valmistajier 	

Sinclair?

- Founded as Westminster Mail Order Ltd. in 1973
- From hobbyist electronics to home computer oriented company in ~1980
- Founder **Sir Clive Sinclair**, face of micros in UK: "Uncle Clive"
- Industrial designer Rick Dickinson
- Miniature TVs, calculators, electric cars...
- Computers: ZX80, ZX81, ZX Spectrum, Spectrum 128, Sinclair QL
- Name and product line sold to Amstrad in 1986









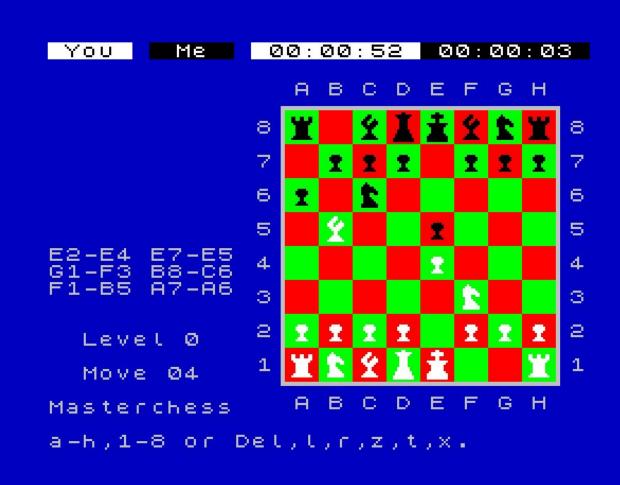
Magazines

Spectrum setup





(Psion/Sinclair Research, 1983)





Chequered Flag

(Psion/Sinclair Research, 1983)



Horace goes Skiing (Psion/Sinclair Research, 1982)

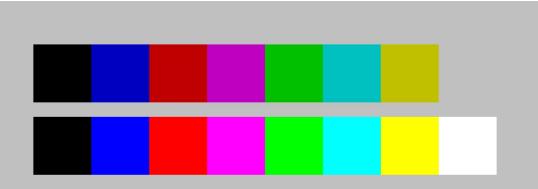


VU-3D (Psion/Sinclair Research, 1982)

Colours

8 colours with two brightness-levels

- Black has only single level so "15 colours"
- Two brightnesses cannot be mixed
- FLASH attribute
- Colours cannot be changed

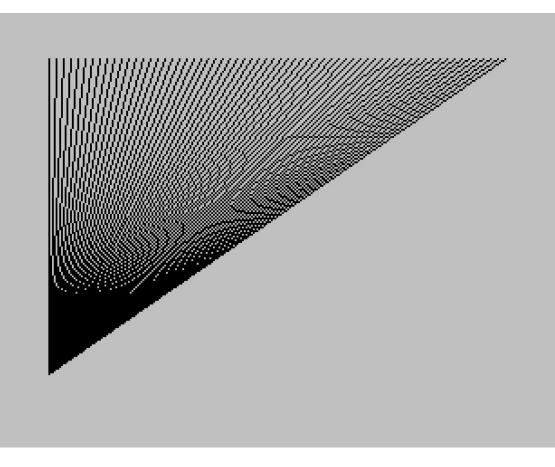


Ø OK, 60:1

Pixels

256 x 192

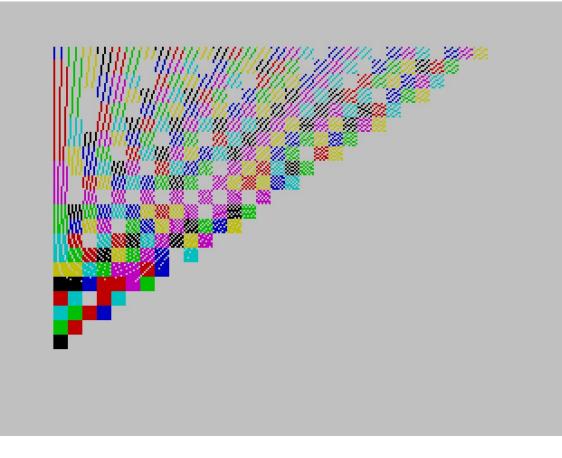
- 1 bit = 1 pixel
- 1 byte = 8 pixels



"Attribute clash"

Colours can be set in 32 x 24 resolution (768 cells)

Trying to simply draw different colored lines next to each other will result in clash.



Manic Miner (Bug-Byte, 1983)

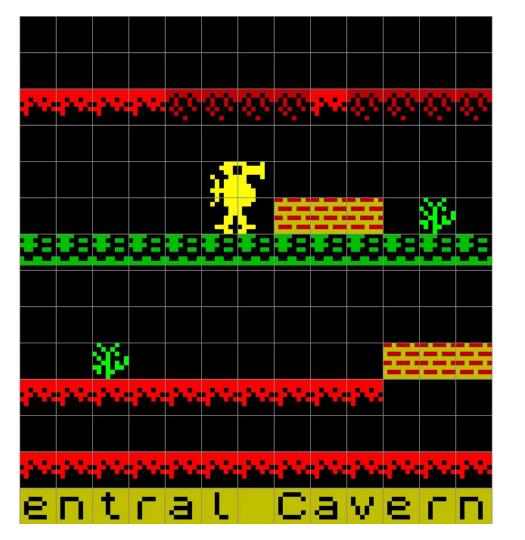


Manic Miner (Bug-Byte, 1983)

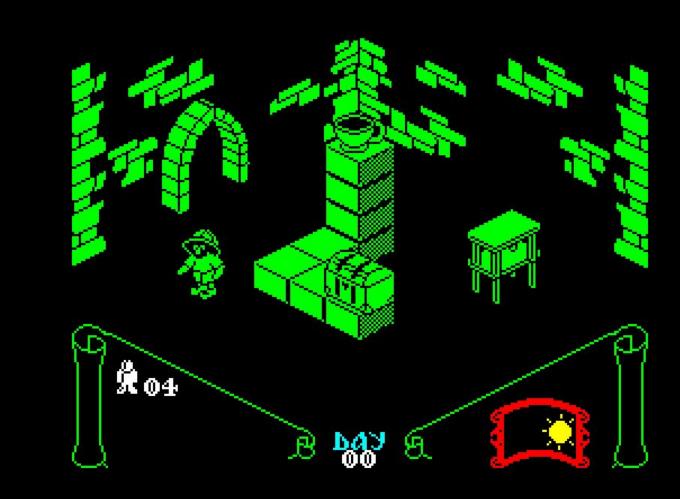
8x8 areas are also game tiles

16x16 pixel player and monster graphics

(Font is the ZX Spectrum standard character set)







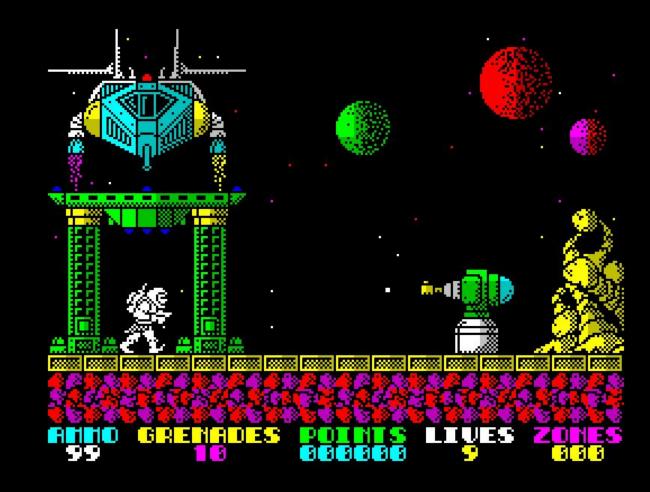
THE LORD OF DOWN He stands at a keep in the Domain of Grang, Looking North to the Downs of Grang.

· 👾

....

Lords of Midnight (Beyond, 1984)



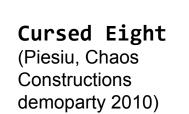




PSSST (Loading Screen, Ultimate 1983)

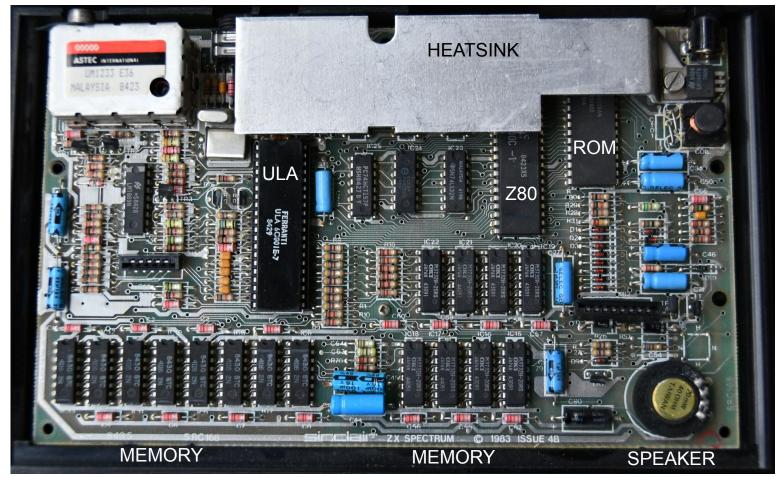


Head over Heels (Loading Screen, Ocean, 1987)





TV OUT

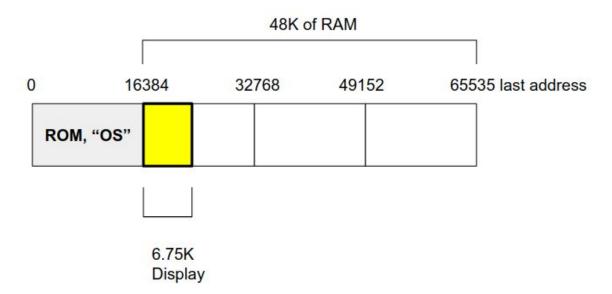


(Wikimedia commons, AUIC Oficial/Fernando Sáenz, Public Domain)

Z80 chip, ULA and memory mapped graphics

CPU and graphics chip can alternatively "see" the memory area reserved for display.

- The 8-bit Z80 has 16-bit addressing, can access 65536 memory locations.
- Graphics chip *Ferranti* ULA (once-programmable chip, precursor to FPGA)
- Writing to display memory results in direct changes on the screen



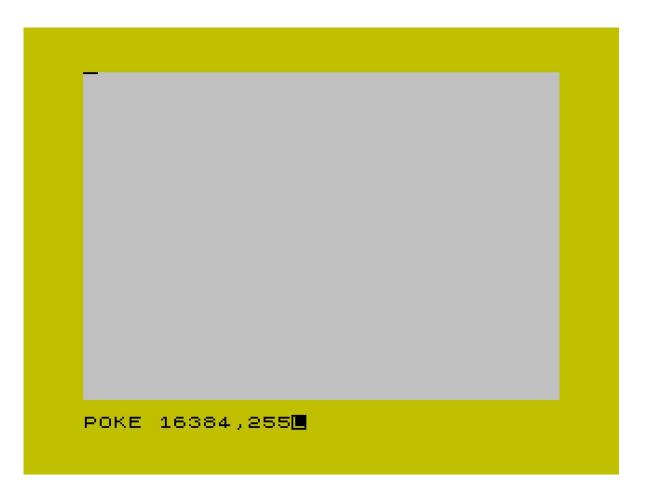
Graphics in binary

Using BASIC to write into the display memory.

Bitmap at 16384

Colors start from 16384+6144= 22528

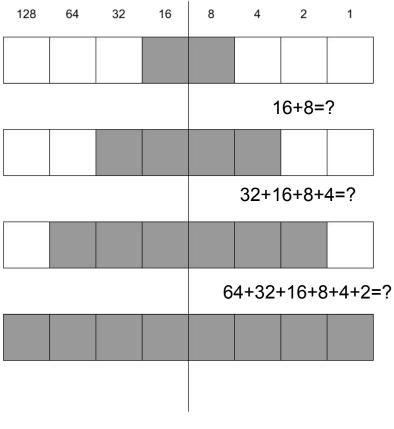
32x24=768 color cells



Graphics in binary

From hardware perspective, there is no way to light a single "bit" directly. An 8-bit value (0-255) has to be written, causing a number of pixels to change at once.

- Graphics were often planned on grid paper and sometimes calculated by hand
- BASIC had PLOT and DRAW commands to make life easier

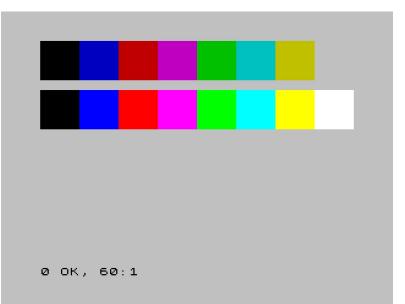


128+64+32+16+8+4+2+1=?

Color cells (32x24)

- 0-7 INK
- 0-7 PAPER
- BRIGHT bit 0-1
- FLASH bit 0-1 (let's not use it)

=INK+PAPER*8+BRIGHTNESS*64

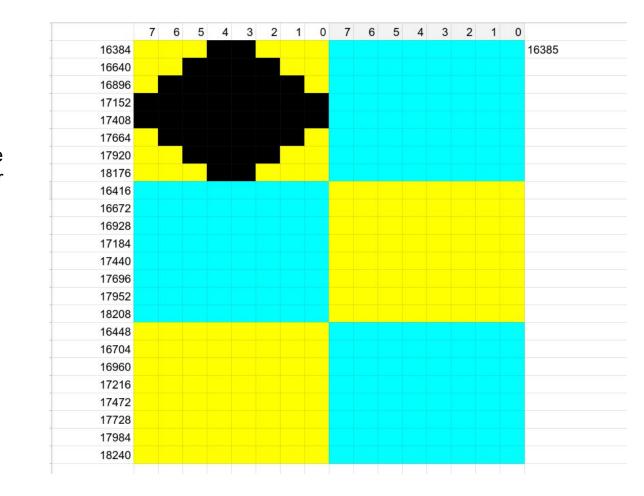


128	64	32	16	8	4	2	1
FLASH	BRIGHT	PAPER bits		INK bits			

Display order

ZX Spectrum display order is likely arranged to better facilitate 8x8 character display and easier alignment of pixel/color display (from a machine code perspective)

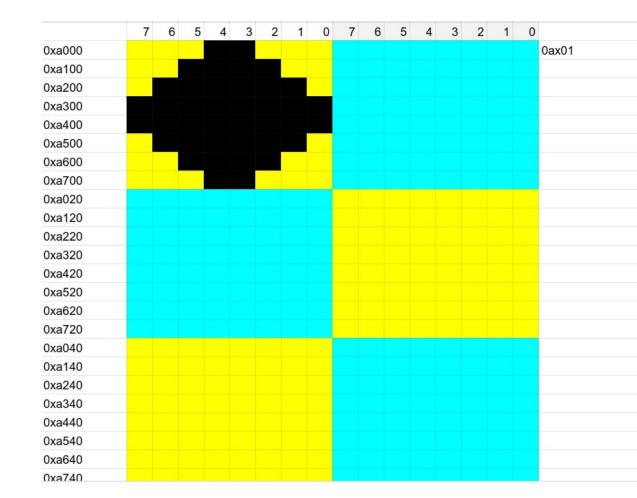
- +1 to move right
- +256 to move down
- +32 to find next character row
- There's more...



Display order

ZX Spectrum display order is likely arranged to better facilitate 8x8 character display and easier alignment of pixel/color display (from a machine code perspective)

- +1 to move right
- +256 to move down
- +32 to find next character row
- There's more...



Display order

Although the address advances logically up until 8 "character rows" (64 pixel rows)

- Screen is arranged into three zones 2048 bytes apart.
- Ok for showing characters but caused problems for game graphics

16384	
+32	
+32	
+32	
16284.0048	
16384+2048	
16384+4096	
1000414000	
	© 1982 Sinclair Research Ltd

