

# Some Features of Caja, the File Browser

by Andy Pepperdine

## **Introduction**

Linux file browsers have undergone a number of transformations and rebrandings. The distributions based on Ubuntu for the Gnome-based desktop now use Caja, which is a derivative of the earlier Nautilus. This browser is the one used by most of the group, and so is the one I shall describe here.

When it is started, by default it will display the home directory as icons for each directory and file contained there.

## **Preferences**

The menu entry Edit → Preferences will show a dialog that enables you to tailor it how you best like it.

## **View tab**

The View tab defines the default appearance when a new directory is displayed. You can set it either to display icons or a list of files. You can also define the default ordering for the times by various attributes. By Name, which means alphabetically, is the default, and probably most useful, although others are sometimes more valuable, like by date. These are for the default case. The appearance can be changed on a on-off basis for a display while looking at it.

## **Behaviour tab**

This is where you can select how many clicks are needed to open a file from the browser, and whether you wish to be plagued by questions about emptying the wastebasket when you need to.

## **Display tab**

Here you can determine whether any information is to be displayed under the icons when viewing files as icons. There are up to three values to be selected. In the default display, only the first item is shown. If you zoom out using the magnification selection at the top of the window, then only the name will appear. If you zoom out, then the second item will also be shown, and zooming further out will display all three items.

You can also define the format of the date to be displayed.

A word about the last item here: Size in IEC units. IEC is the International Electrotechnical Commission, and has defined a number of prefixes for large numbers subtly different from the standard scientific (Système International, or SI) prefixes. When SI units are used, then a prefix k will mean a multiple of 1000 (or  $10^3$ ). But in the IEC system the prefix Ki is used and will mean 1024 (or  $2^{10}$ ). Similarly for higher values, where M (SI) means  $1000^2$ , and Mi (IEC) will mean  $1024^2$ . A good description of the issue and table of conversions is in Wikipedia at:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binary\\_prefix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binary_prefix)

## List Columns tab

When the display in Caja shows a list of items, rather than icons for each item, then under this tab you can say what information is to be displayed in the columns of the list.

## Preview tab

Here you can change whether you want to see thumbnails for pictures, and set a limit on the size of the file where it will generate a thumbnail. Also whether you want to hear the music play when mousing over a music file.

## Media tab

When you plug in another device, this tab enable you to say how you want Caja to behave, whether to ask you, start it playing automatically, etc. When you have set it to ask you, but then you click the option on the request dialog to always perform that operation. It can be useful to remember how to turn it off again!

## Extensions tab

This gives a list of the installed extensions and whether they are enabled. I am not going to discuss any extensions here.

## View

When Caja opens a new directory, by default it will display each entry in the directory as an icon, and a list of Places in a pane on the left. The appearance can be changed by means of items in the View menu.

## Tabs

You can have any number of places open by creating tabs with File → New Tab, or CTRL-T. This operates like tabs on a web browser.

## Making two panes

A useful feature can be to split the file list pane into two separate panes by View → Extra Pane, or use the F3 key. These are independent, so can be set up to show different directories, and can then be used to easily copy and transfer files from one to the other.

You can do this only once. Hitting F3 a second time will remove the pane without the mouse focus.

## File lists

Sometimes icons are not the most useful way to see the information you need, so you can get a list instead, which can show a number of different columns, for instance the last modified date, size in bytes, and file type. Other attributes are available via View → Visible Columns.

You can then change the order of the display by clicking on the header of a column to sort according to that column. A little black triangle will appear at the top of the column used for sorting. Another click on the column header will reverse the sort order.

These modification to the display apply only to the current directory. In fact, Caja will remember how a directory was displayed, so when you return to it, the display will be as it was the last time you used it.

## Hidden files

Hidden files on Linux are files whose names start with a dot. Almost all of them will be found in your home directory, and you will not normally want to view them.

They are by default not shown. View → Show Hidden Files will do what it says.

## Side pane

The side pane shows a number of common places you may wish to visit. These include various directories on your computer's file system, devices not yet accessible, bookmarks and various places it knows about on your network.

It can be removed using the little X at its top, and can be recovered with View → Side Pane, or the F9 key.

## Access to a server

If you want to access a remote server, then Caja can also help you. Suppose you want to update a remote website, and know your login credentials, then the menu entry File → Connect to Server will present a dialog asking for these details. It supports a number of different protocols, such as FTP (public or via login) Apple Files, SSH, WebDAV and Windows shares.

You can say whether you want Caja to remember the login details temporarily or for ever. It seems it encrypts the details, and does not allow you to see these details later. At least, I've not found a way of getting to show you.

When you have completed the dialog and connected, Caja offers a pane just like any other directory, and will allow you to do what your login access will allow. It also puts onto your desktop an icon just as though you had plugged in a USB device. When you have finished, then you can unmount the file system through this icon, or via the mark against the entry in the Network list of the Places side pane.

A word of warning. Caja tries to do things in parallel when operating on remote systems, and if you ask it to do too many things at once (e.g. copy dozens of files), your remote server may object. It's safer to keep the number of simultaneous transfers to less than 20. But try your case, it may work fine.

## File transfers

A good use for this feature is to access a smart phone, or tablet, in order to download pictures, or other files, from it, and do so over wifi, rather than connecting cables.

First, get a suitable app for your phone which provides ftp access to it. One example for Android is WifiFTP. When you start this you will be asked to set access security details, like a login name and password. You can change these in the settings later if you need to.

When the phone is connected to a wifi network, like your home router, starting the app shows a URL, which will look something like this: <ftp://192.168.1.66:2121>. If you put that URL

into web browser, then it will show you a list of files in the “home” directory, and allow you to display those files, or download them. However, a web browser may not support putting files into that directory.

If, instead, in Caja you say File → Connect to Server, and you use the IP address part of the URL (i.e. in the above example, 192.168.1.66) as a name of the server in Caja to make the connection to the server, and specify the port number (in this case, 2121), then it will connect and display the files as though they were part of your local file system. Remember also to select the type of protocol to use, typically FTP (with login), and provide user name and password.

If your router always allocates the same address for each device, then you can safely bookmark this device in Caja, and it will remember how to connect. How you control the router’s connection depends on the router. Read the instructions for your router when administering it.

## **Bookmarks**

At any time, you may want to remember a common directory that you continually return to. Bookmarks → Add Bookmark (or CTRL-D) will do so, and it will appear both under the list of bookmarks in the side pane and in the list under the Bookmarks menu. This can be particularly useful when operating on remote systems, since setting a bookmark there will remember the access details for it. If you ask Caja when connecting to the server to remember it for ever, then clicking on the bookmark will seamlessly show the contents as expected.

Caja does not allow you to change how it logs into a server, or even to see what username and passwords are used. The only way to change that information is to delete the bookmark and connect again with the new details, and then bookmark that.

Bookmarks can be given names, and these names can be changed with Bookmarks → Edit Bookmarks, so you can choose short meaningful names for your remote connections and long paths.

## **Shortcuts**

Common functions in Caja are available from the keyboard. Here are some I use.

CTRL-1 : icon view for a directory

CTRL-2 : list view for a directory

CTRL-A : select all

CTRL-H : show hidden files

CTRL-S : select items matching a pattern. (Relies on you knowing how to specify the pattern.)

F1 : help

F3 : split pane into 2, or revert to one. (Works on each tab separately.)

F9 : toggles the side pane display

## **References**

The Caja Help information is good (Help → Contents, or key F1). Mint seems to have a modified Caja. The Spatial view, for instance, is not available under MATE.