CHAPTER 3

CUSTOMIZING MAC OS X

Mac users have always been a creative bunch. One way that creativity manifests itself is in the way we like to customize our computers. Nearly every aspect of Mac OS X can be adjusted, enhanced, or otherwise tweaked to suit your personality and your individual style of working. Some modifications are just for fun, while others can boost your productivity, save you time, and make your Mac a genuine partner in your work.

The techniques covered in this chapter all involve some sort of customization. Whether it's sprucing up your toolbars with additional icons, turning your desktop into an animated aquarium, or bringing back your favorite interface features from Mac OS 9, the next several techniques can help you to make your Mac truly personal. Some of the techniques even contradict each other a bit ("Add more icons to your Dock! No, wait — remove them all!"), but that reflects the delightful reality that we all "think different." Choose the techniques that best fit your needs and interests.

TECHNIQUE **10**

PUTTING MORE "TOOL" IN YOUR TOOLBARS

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ABOUT THE FEATURE

Every Finder window contains a customizable area called the toolbar, which can give you quick access to navigation, searching, and file management tools. Toolbars are most effective when personalized to meet your needs.

All Finder windows have an area at the top known as the toolbar, as shown in **Figure 10.1**. Along with the Dock, this is one of the most striking changes from Mac OS 9's Finder appearance. And like the Dock, it is highly customizable, though its power is rarely exploited. In this technique, you see just how valuable toolbars can be.

You must first understand a couple of basics. First, every Finder window has the *same* toolbar — changes you make to one affect all of them. Second, you can selectively hide or show the toolbar for each window. To toggle toolbars on or off, you can either click the little pill-shaped button on the right side of the window's title bar or choose **Hide Toolbar** or **Show Toolbar** (as appropriate) from the **View** menu.

Toolbar buttons require only one click to use, just like icons in the Dock (and unlike the rest of the Finder). A single click on the Home button, for example, displays the contents of your home folder. You can also use drag-and-drop on toolbar buttons, so dragging a file onto the Home button on

your toolbar moves it to your home folder. Likewise, dragging a file to an application icon on your toolbar opens the file in that application.

STEP 1: REMOVE TOOLS YOU NEVER USE

The first step in having a useful toolbar is to get rid of all icons you don't use. By default, Finder toolbars display, from left to right, Back and Forward buttons, a View selector, a divider; then buttons for your Computer, Home, Favorites, and Applications folders, respectively; and finally a Search box. (If your window is too narrow to display them all, click the chevron (») icon to display a pop-up menu with the remaining choices, as shown in **Figure 10.3**.) You can remove or rearrange all these elements — and, of course, you can easily restore them if you change your mind.

- Decide whether to eliminate the heart-shaped Favorites button. Because you have lots of places to keep aliases to favorite files and other easy ways to access them, this button might be superfluous. To remove it, hold down the ⌘ key and drag the button off the toolbar.
- Consider removing the View selector. Although you may change window views frequently, it's very easy to do by using menu commands on the **View** menu (or their keyboard equivalents). The extra space might come in handy; if you think so, you can ⌘+drag off the View selector as well.
- Pay attention to the buttons you use regularly. The **Computer**, **Home**, and **Applications** buttons are more a matter of personal work habits. By using the other techniques in this chapter and the next one, I've found that I rarely need to open any of those folders — and when I do, several other quick shortcuts can do the trick. However, your mileage may vary. If you don't use a given button at least a few times a week, consider removing it. You'll be glad for the extra space shortly.

TIP

Toolbars make the most sense with relatively wide windows because the icons don't shrink like those in the Dock do. You might find that Column View, which also works best with wide windows, is a good partner for your new toolbars.

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STEP 2: ADD TOOLS FROM APPLE'S COLLECTION

Now that you've cleared some space, fill it up with buttons that might be a bit more useful. Although you can add any icon on your computer to a toolbar, Apple supplies some special buttons that you might want to start with. To display them, right-click (or Control+click) on any part of the toolbar and choose **Customize Toolbar** from the contextual menu. The window changes (**Figure 10.4**) to reveal a wide variety of buttons from which you can choose.

TIP

Whatever else you do, I recommend leaving the Back and Forward buttons and the Search box. They come in handy in other techniques.

■ To add a button, simply drag it to the toolbar. You can arrange buttons in any order, and you can also drag to rearrange ones already there. The first item from this group you might consider is the Path control. Displaying your current folder's location within the file system has always been possible by ⌘+clicking the window title (**Figure 10.5**). This control does exactly the same thing, but without requiring you to use your other hand to hold down an extra key (**Figure 10.6**).

Beyond that, it's again a matter of which buttons, if any, appeal to your needs and style of working. I suggest, though, that you bypass the **Delete** button. As the name suggests, clicking this button deletes any selected files (by moving them to the Trash). However, doing this requires two clicks (select the file, then click the button). In a moment, I'll show you how you can add a Trash icon to your toolbar to delete files with a single click-and-drag.

■ When you're finished making changes, click **Done** to return your window to its normal state.

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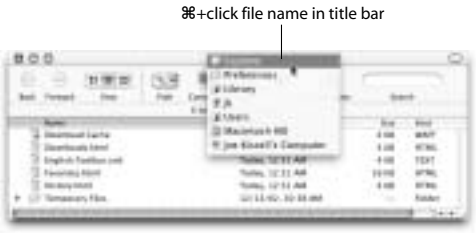

10.5

STEP 3: ADD YOUR OWN TOOLS

It's time to get creative and select icons of your own to add to the toolbar. These should be folders, files, or applications you want to use frequently. How do you decide which icons should go in the toolbar and which should go in the Dock? There's no magic formula (and no reason icons can't go both places). As a general rule, though, it makes the most sense for the icons in a Finder toolbar to be ones that open specific folders or act on files, whereas the Dock is a better place for applications (and folders or volumes you want to navigate quickly without opening any new windows). **Figure 10.7** shows a toolbar with the following useful icons added:

■ Desktop (displays the contents of your desktop folder)

■ Documents (displays the contents of your Documents folder)

■ StuffIt Expander (expands any file using drag-and-drop)

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STEP 4: ADD THE TRASH TO YOUR TOOLBAR

If the **Delete** button that Apple provides as a built-in toolbar option doesn't quite cut it for you, put a Trash icon in your toolbar for conventional drag-and-drop file deletion. Here's how:

- Select any folder on your hard drive (or create a new one). Make an alias to this folder by pressing **⌘+L**. Name this new alias **Trash**.
- With the Trash alias selected, choose **Get Info** from the **File** menu. Click **Select New Original**.
- When the Open sheet appears, type `~/.Trash` and press **Return**. You'll notice that a folder called `.Trash` is highlighted, even though it's dimmed as being unavailable, as shown in **Figure 10.8**. Click **Choose** to reassign your new alias to the Trash. (Leave the Info window open for now.)
- You now have a folder alias pointing to the Trash, but it doesn't *look* like the Trash. To solve that, click the Trash icon in your Dock to open the Trash window. With no files selected, choose **Get Info** from the **File** menu to display the Trash info. Now click the icon in the Trash's Info window and press **⌘+C** to copy it. Switch to the Info window for your new alias, click the folder icon to select it, and press **⌘+V** to paste. Your alias should now look like the Trash (albeit with an arrow in the corner). You can close both Info windows.
- Last but not least, move it to a location where you won't accidentally delete it — perhaps your Documents folder. (If you miss having a Trash icon on your desktop, you can, of course, keep it there.)
- Now drag your new alias to the toolbar and you're done! **Figure 10.9** shows the final product. To use the toolbar Trash icon, drag files into it just as you would to the Dock's Trash. You'll notice that your toolbar Trash icon does not change to show that it has files in it, and even the real Trash icon in the Dock might not reflect the change until you click it. In addition, you cannot use this icon to eject removable media. But for deleting files quickly, you'll find that dragging them a short distance onto the toolbar rather than all the way to the Dock is generally quicker and easier.

STEP 5: CHANGE THE DISPLAY MODE (OPTIONAL)

As you add icons to your toolbar, you may find it gets very crowded. You have three options for adjusting the display of your toolbar, and you can choose whichever one makes the most sense to you. The three options (Icon & Text Mode, Icon Only Mode, and Text Only Mode) are shown in **Figure 10.10**.

- If your Customize Toolbar sheet is open, you can change modes by choosing the one you want from the **Show** pop-up menu in the lower-left corner.

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■ If your Customize Toolbar sheet is closed, the quickest way to change modes is to right-click (or Control+click) on the toolbar and make your selection from the contextual menu that appears.

STEP 6: USE TOOLBAR SCRIPTS

AppleScript is Apple's easy-to-learn scripting language. Using tools such as Script Editor or the more powerful AppleScript Studio (included with the Developer Tools you installed in Technique 3), anyone can create powerful programs without having to study a complex, low-level language. AppleScript is ideal for manipulating files and folders in the Finder, and an AppleScript application can, like other applications, appear in your toolbar. Apple (and some third parties) have designed a number of AppleScripts, known as *toolbar scripts,* that are specially suited for use in toolbars. You are *not* going to learn AppleScript here. Instead, you find out where to find toolbar scripts other people have created and use them on your own toolbars.

■ The first place to look is on Apple's Web site. Go to `www.apple.com/applescript/toolbar/`, where Apple has posted a large selection of scripts you can download, along with directions for using them.
■ After you've downloaded a script and stored it somewhere safe (like your Documents folder), drag it onto a toolbar to install it. **Figure 10.11** shows a toolbar with a few of these scripts added.

10.10

■ Some scripts are designed to function as a droplet (drag and drop a file onto it to process that file), and some are designed as applets (just click it and it will act on the entire contents of the window, or on selected files). Some can work either way. Read the instructions for each script to determine how it is intended to be used.
■ One of my favorite toolbar scripts is Rotate Image(s), which changes the orientation of pictures from my digital camera right in the Finder — without opening Photoshop or even iPhoto. (This feature is especially effective in combination with Column View's Preview column.)
■ Another favorite script comes not from Apple but from a developer named Marc Linyage. His Open Terminal Here toolbar script (available free at `www.entropy.ch/software/applescript/welcome.html`) is shown in **Figure 10.12**. One click, and a new Terminal window opens, with its working directory already changed to the current folder.
■ To find more toolbar scripts, visit `www.versiontracker.com`. Click the Mac OS X tab and search for "toolbar script."

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TECHNIQUE 11

ENHANCING THE LOOK AND FUNCTIONALITY OF YOUR WINDOWS

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ABOUT THE FEATURE

Finder windows are both beautiful and functional with their array of Aqua controls and high-tech drop shadows. By taking a few extra steps, you can make them downright fun — and even more useful.

Mac OS X provides plenty of options for customizing your windows. Not only can customization make your Mac a lot more fun and interesting to look at, it gives you visual cues that help you locate particular windows and icons quickly.

Before you get to the technique, you should be aware of a sometimes confusing aspect of the Aqua interface: Windows and folders are two very different things. Using the words *window* and *folder* interchangeably is tempting (and I sometimes do). After all, every time you open a folder it shows up in its own window, right? Well, sort of — but in Mac OS X, you can have several windows open at the same time that display the contents of the same folder, and all of those windows can have different sizes, views, and other attributes. In addition, every time you press ⌘+N, you open a new window — but without opening any particular folder. So what are you really customizing here, folders or windows? And how can you tell which attributes will be saved when?

What you're actually customizing is the window attributes that are used by particular folders. If you open a folder, change the attributes of the window that appears, and then close the window, those attributes will be saved in that folder. The next time you open that folder, it displays in the same size, location, view, and so on as when you last saw it. If you have *just one window* open in the Finder, make changes to it, and close it, those settings will be used every time you open a new Finder window.

If you want to be sure the changes you make to a window affect only one folder, make sure it's not the *only* folder with an open window when you modify and close it. Conversely, if you really do want to change the attributes of all new windows, make sure the window you're modifying is the only one open at the time.

STEP 1: ADD A FOLDER BACKGROUND

Have you ever downloaded a piece of software, double-clicked the disk image, and seen something like **Figure 11.3**? It looks like a window, but not like any window on your computer. How did it get that way? Is this some black art that only Mac developers are privy to? Not at all. You, too, can customize the living daylights out of any window. Apart from the fact that it's a fun way to impress your Windows-using friends, customizing window backgrounds can be useful. If you have lots of windows open at once, picking out the one you're looking for is easy if it has a distinctive appearance. To customize a Finder window, do the following:

11.3

- First, prepare a graphic to be used for the background. This can be a photo from your iPhoto collection, a PDF file, a JPEG downloaded from the Web, or a drawing you created from scratch. There's just one catch: You need to make it the correct size for your window. When you place a graphic on your window background, it is not resized or scaled. A picture from your digital camera that's 1600 × 1200 pixels, for example, would show only a small corner when placed in a window. If you're starting with a large photo, use your favorite graphics program (GraphicConverter, Photoshop Elements, or whatever you have handy) to resize your image to dimensions that will fit comfortably in a modestly sized window — try 300 × 400 pixels as a first pass.
- Open the folder you want to customize. Be sure the window is in Icon View; background graphics can't be used in List View or Column View. The shortcut to activate Icon View is **⌘+1**.
- Press **⌘+J** (or choose **Show View Options** from the **View** menu) to display View Options. A floating window like the one in **Figure 11.4** appears.
- Make sure **This window only** is selected at the top if you don't want this picture to appear on the background of every single window. Click the **Picture** radio button at the very bottom of the window and then click **Select** and navigate to the graphic you prepared. After selecting the graphic, click **Select**. Your graphic will automagically be placed on the background of your window, as in **Figure 11.5**.

■ Using the resize box in the lower-right corner of the window, resize the window so that the edges of the graphic are just covered.
■ If your graphic is too large or too small, resize it in your graphics application and repeat the preceding procedure.
■ If you don't have any appropriate pictures handy, you can still spruce up your windows by adding a solid color background. In the **View Options** window, click **Color** instead of **Picture** and use the color picker to select your favorite color.

STEP 2: USE CUSTOM ICONS

You can give any file or folder a unique, custom icon. As with window backgrounds, this can be more than decoration — it can help you easily pick out important folders in a window full of plain blue icons. Custom icons are especially useful if you add multiple folder or volume icons to your Dock or toolbars.

Custom icons are easy to find. Sites such as `www.xicons.com` and `www.iconfactory.com` each have thousands of high-quality Mac OS X icons you can download for free.

■ Download the packages you're interested in and unstuff them.
■ Select a file that has an icon you want to use. Press **⌘+I** (or choose **Get Info** from the File menu).
■ Click the icon in the Info window to select it and press **⌘+C** to copy it. Close the Info window.
■ Now select the file or folder you want to use your new icon on. Once again, press **⌘+I** to display the Info window. Select the icon and press **⌘+V** to paste your new icon over it. This is illustrated in **Figure 11.6**.

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■ If you ever want to remove your custom icon and revert to the default icon, just select the icon in the Info window and press **Delete**.

Although custom-designed icons often look best, you can use *any* graphic on your hard drive — including PDF files — as an icon. If you have a favorite photograph, drawing, or even a tax form you want to turn into an icon, it's easy.

■ Open the file you want to use in Preview. (If it's a multi-page PDF, select the page you want to use in the Thumbnail view on the right.) Press **⌘+C** to copy the graphic.
■ Select the icon in the Info window of the file or folder you want to customize and press **⌘+V** to paste.
■ All your graphics files can also have instant custom icons. In any folder containing graphics files, choose **Show View Options** from the **View** menu. Click the **Show icon preview** checkbox, and each graphic icon in that folder turns into a miniature version of the entire image. See **Figure 11.7** for an example.

11.7

STEP 3: CUSTOMIZE ICON VIEW WINDOW LAYOUT

The View Options window has some additional controls for customizing your window display that I haven't mentioned yet. The options available vary depending on which view is active. First, you'll customize options for a window in Icon View (because that's what you've just been working with); then look at List View. Most of the layout options are self-explanatory, so I'll just mention them briefly.

■ With the folder of your choice open and in Icon View, choose **Show View Options** from the **View** menu. Make sure the radio button next to **This window only** is selected at the top.
■ Change the size of the icons in this window from mini to maxi (or anywhere in between) by moving the **Icon size** slider.
■ Choose a larger or smaller font for filenames, if you want, from the **Text size** pop-up menu.
■ If you prefer the filename to appear on the right, rather than underneath the icons, click the **Right** radio button beneath **Label position**. **Figure 11.8** shows a window with extra-large icons, a large font, and filename displayed on the right.
■ Check **Snap to grid** to keep all your icons neatly aligned on an invisible grid.

TIP

You can use all the View customizations you've just tried on the desktop, too. Just click anywhere on your desktop, choose Show View Options from the View menu, and go to town.

■ If you check **Show item info**, an additional line of text will appear below the names of certain files, as shown in **Figure 11.9**. Folders, for example, will show the number of items they contain, graphics (of certain types) will show their dimensions in pixels, and audio files will display their length.

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■ Finally, if you want your icons to organize themselves even when files are added or removed from the window, check **Keep arranged by** and choose **Name**, **Date Modified**, **Date Created**, **Size**, or **Kind**.

STEP 4: CUSTOMIZE LIST VIEW WINDOW LAYOUT

For windows in List View, you have some different options, as shown in **Figure 11.10**.

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- Choose a larger size for List View icons, if you want, by clicking the radio button beneath the larger icon.
- You can choose which columns are shown for this window by checking the checkboxes next to the attributes you want to see. Of particular interest may be **Comments**. Displaying the Comments column in List View is the only way to see comments you've entered about files without opening the Info window.
- Every column header in List View is also a button that you can use to sort the window contents by that attribute. For example, click the **Date Modified** column header to sort files by date; click the **Name** header to sort by name. Clicking any header a second time reverses the sort order.
- You can also resize columns in List View to show more or less information. Position your pointer on the dividing line between two columns, and its shape will change to a vertical line with a pair of arrows. Click and drag left or right to change the column width.
- Finally, you can arrange columns. The only restriction is that the **Name** column must come first. If you would rather see the **Kind** column, for example, before the **Size**, you can easily do so. Click and hold the mouse button on a column heading, and when it changes to a "grabbing hand" shape, drag the column left or right to reposition it.

Figure 11.11 shows a window in List View with customized columns and icon size. For even more ways to customize your windows, see Technique 17, "Restoring 'Missing' Classic Features to Mac OS X."

11.11

TECHNIQUE 12

AUTOMATING THE FINDER WITH SCRIPTS AND FOLDER ACTIONS

12.1

12.2

ABOUT THE FEATURE

AppleScript provides a convenient way to automate repetitive tasks without learning a lot of programming. Mac OS X includes two hidden features — the Script menu and folder actions — that make scripts even easier to use.

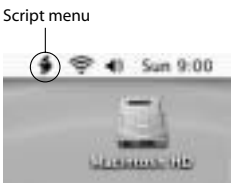
If you read Technique 10, "Putting More 'Tool' in Your Toolbars," you're already familiar with the idea of using AppleScript applications to add capabilities to your Finder windows. In this technique, you again use AppleScripts in the Finder, but in two different ways. First, you add a menu to the Finder toolbar to provide single-click access to your favorite scripts. Then you explore a super-cool (and little-used) Mac OS X feature called *folder actions*.

You can do everything in this technique without knowing any AppleScript at all. However, if you want to take these concepts further, you'll need to learn some AppleScript programming.

STEP 1: INSTALL SCRIPT MENU

Apple included a system-wide menu for AppleScripts in Mac OS X. However, probably thinking it would be confusing to beginning users, they left it deactivated by default. Before you do anything else, turn it on.

- Open the **AppleScript** folder inside your **Applications** folder. You'll see a folder icon named **ScriptMenu.menu**. Drag this icon to your menu bar (near your clock) and release the mouse button. The new scroll-shaped Script menu now appears on your menu bar, as shown in **Figure 12.3**.
- Click this menu to see a number of submenus filled with useful sample scripts supplied by Apple. Feel free to take some time to try out any that look interesting to you. A few fun (and somewhat useful) examples include the following:
  - **Current Date & Time** on the **Info Scripts** submenu opens a window showing the current date and time, with an optional button to copy this information to the clipboard.
  - **Current Temperature by Zipcode** on the **Internet Services** submenu displays a box for you to enter your current Zip code. After you've done so, the script checks a weather site on the Web, gets the current temperature, and displays it in another window.
  - **Crazy Message Text** on the **Mail Scripts** submenu (see **Figure 12.4**) asks you to enter some text, which it then uses to create a new Mail message in a wacky assortment of fonts, sizes, and colors. The result is shown in **Figure 12.5** (CP.2).



12.3

You will use a few other scripts in a moment.

Remember, AppleScripts are just mini-programs. An AppleScript may not have windows or controls of its own (though many do). Because AppleScripts are so varied, the best way to find out what a given script does is to try it out.

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STEP 2: ADD NEW SCRIPTS

Although Apple's sample scripts are interesting, you can download hundreds of other scripts that will give you an astonishing array of features. (Note that the Scripts menu supports not only AppleScripts but also shell scripts and perl scripts.)

Here are a few sources for downloading new scripts:

- Apple's own AppleScript site at `www.apple.com/applescript/script_menu/` has a few additional scripts you can download.
- The sites `www.applescriptcentral.com` and `www.macscripter.net` both have large collections of AppleScripts and AppleScript-related information contributed by people from all over the world.
- Let's not forget our old standby, VersionTracker. Visit `www.versiontracker.com`, click the Mac OS X tab, and search for AppleScript for dozens of additional scripts.

After you have the new scripts, what do you do with them? You'll need to put them where the Script menu can find them.

- Move your new scripts to the **/Library/Scripts** folder. They should appear immediately on the **Script** menu. (To avoid making the menu too unwieldy, you might want to consider grouping your new scripts into folders, or placing them in an existing folder if appropriate.)

STEP 3: INSTALL FOLDER ACTIONS SCRIPTS

Now that you've activated the Script menu, you can explore an even more powerful way of using AppleScripts: *folder actions*. A folder action is a script that's "attached" to a folder so that it runs automatically when the folder changes in some way. Depending on what the script is designed to do, it can run when the folder window is opened, closed, or moved, or when items are added or removed from the folder — even if it's closed.

Just to give you a general idea of the possibilities, here are some examples of things you could do with folder actions.

- Run a series of Photoshop filters automatically on every file dropped into a certain folder.
- Convert audio, video, or graphics files to a different format or sort them into different folders depending on their attributes.
- Mail, upload, or compress files dropped on a folder without any further steps.
- Display an alert box when the content of a folder changes.
- Prevent a folder window from ever being moved or closed.

I should warn you right here that these possibilities, while intriguing, do come at a certain cost. Unless someone has already written exactly the script you need for your ideal folder action, you'll need to learn a bit of AppleScript to create your own (or at least modify someone else's script). AppleScript is not hard to learn, but it does take some time to understand and become proficient with it. The Web sites listed in **Step 1** point you to some great online and print resources for learning AppleScript.

That said, now you can get your feet wet. Although support for folder actions is built into Mac OS X, Apple suggests that you download an updated set of control scripts before beginning to work with them. Download and install these now.

- Enter **www.apple.com/applescript/folder_actions/FA_archive.sit** into your Web browser and press **Return**. The updated scripts download to your computer. Unstuff the archive

(if it doesn't happen automatically). A folder containing six scripts appears, as shown in **Figure 12.6**.

- Open the **/Library/Scripts** folder. It should look something like **Figure 12.7**. Open the **Folder Actions** folder and drag all four scripts inside it (*Attach Script to Folder.scpt, Remove Folder Actions.scpt, Disable Folder Actions.scpt, and Enable Folder Actions.scpt*) to the Trash. Now drag the six scripts from the **FA_archive** folder you just downloaded into the **Folder Actions** folder. You can close the Scripts window.
- Click the **Script** menu and choose the **Folder Actions** submenu, where you can now see the six scripts you just installed. Choose **Enable Folder Actions**. An alert box appears to confirm that folder actions have been enabled.

STEP 4: ATTACH AND TRY OUT A FOLDER ACTION

Pick a folder, any folder. Attach one of Apple's sample folder action scripts to this folder and try it out, just to see how it's done.

- Choose **Folder Actions** from the Script menu; then choose **Attach Folder Action** from the submenu. A dialog appears asking you to choose a Folder Action. (Initially, this list contains only the three sample scripts Apple provides, but you will see how to add your own shortly.) Select **add - new item alert** and click **OK**.
- An Open dialog appears, asking you to choose a folder to attach the script to. Navigate to any folder you want to experiment on and click **Choose**. Another alert box appears to confirm that the folder action has been attached.
- Now you're ready to try out your new folder action. Drag a file (again, any file will do) into the folder you just selected. The alert box shown in **Figure 12.8** appears. Click **Yes** to open the folder (if, for example, you want to return the file you just dragged in to its home) or **No** if you just want to dismiss the alert.

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That's all there is to it. Attach a script and make changes to the folder — the script will run automatically. Feel free to try out the other sample scripts or just proceed to the next step.

STEP 5: CREATE YOUR OWN FOLDER ACTION

Now that you know how to attach and use a folder action, I will walk through the process of creating your own folder action script from scratch. This is *not* a course in AppleScript, so I'm not going to explain the ins and outs of the script you're about to use. For more details on writing folder action AppleScripts, visit `www.apple.com/applescript/folder_actions` or one of the other AppleScript sites mentioned earlier. This very simple script sorts files dropped onto its attached folder according to file extension.

- Open **Script Editor**. It's located in the **AppleScript** folder in your **Applications** folder.
- Enter the following code *exactly* as it appears here. (Note: Some long lines are split here to fit in this column, but should not be split when you type them. Wherever you see a line break followed by an indent, type the first line, then a space, then the text from the second line. Refer to **Figure 12.9** if you become confused.)

```
on adding folder items to this_folder
     after receiving added_items
tell application "Finder"
repeat with thisItem in added_items
set fileExt to name extension of
     (info for thisItem)
if (not (folder fileExt in this_folder
     exists)) then
make new folder in folder this_folder
     with properties {name:fileExt}
end if
move thisItem to folder fileExt in
     this_folder
end repeat
end tell
end adding folder items to
```

- When you're done, click the Check Syntax button on the toolbar, and your window should look like **Figure 12.9** (CP.3).
- Choose **Save** from the **File** menu. Enter **Simple Sort.scpt** for the name, make sure **Compiled Script** is selected in the **Format** menu, and save it in /Library/Scripts/Folder Action Scripts.
- Following the same procedure used in the last step, attach Simple Sort.scpt (which will now appear in the Attach Folder Action list) to the folder of your choice.

12.9

■ This script will sort all files dropped onto its attached folder by extension. If you have a file ending in a .sit extension, for example, the script will create a folder named "sit" within the attached folder and move your file there. This works whether or not the extension is visible in the Finder. To try it out, drop one or more files onto the folder with the attached script. Then open the folder to confirm that they have been sorted correctly. **Figure 12.10** shows an example of what the results might look like.

This is a very simple, quick-and-dirty example script, not one you would likely use every day. However, you can probably see how it could be enhanced to deal with many different situations. If you were to attach an improved version of this script to your Web browser's download folder, for example, you could automatically ensure that all files you download are sorted into useful subfolders.

12.10

STEP 6: ADD FOLDER BADGES

One last detail. In Mac OS 9, attaching a Folder Action script to a folder automatically added an AppleScript *badge* to the folder's icon, to remind you that it was no longer an ordinary folder. Automatic badges are still missing from Mac OS X, but Apple provides a manual way to badge your folder icons so you'll know which ones have attached scripts.

■ Enter this URL in your browser: **www.apple.com/applescript/folder_actions/FAFolder.icns.sit**. If necessary, unstuff the archive, giving you a file named FAFolder.icns.

■ Select **FAFolder.icns** and choose **Get Info** from the **File** menu. Click the icon in the Info window to select it; then press **⌘+C** to copy it. Close the Info window.

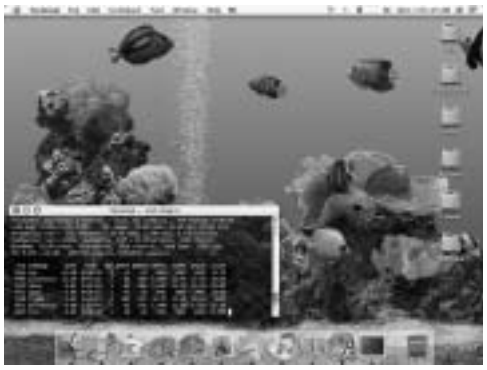
■ Now select the folder you recently attached a script to. Again, choose **Get Info**. Now click the icon and press **⌘+V** to paste the badged icon over it. Close the window, and your folder will be badged, as shown in **Figure 12.11**. (If you later want to remove the badge, just select the icon in the Info window again and press **Delete**.)

12.11

TECHNIQUE 13

TAILORING THE DESKTOP TO YOUR PERSONALITY

13.1



13.2

ABOUT THE FEATURE

The desktop — the background area of your screen where your hard drive icon appears — can do more than collect files you haven't bothered to file any place else. It can also express your personality, entertain, or even relax you.

I try very hard to keep my desktop neat and organized — ideally showing only the icons of my hard drive and other mounted volumes. Yet despite my best efforts, it often ends up being a storage place for files I've downloaded or created but haven't taken the time to sort properly yet. They end up staying there for a long time, because I usually have a dozen or more windows open at once and they completely obscure the desktop — I barely know it's there.

Perhaps you're neater than I am and keep everything in its place. Or perhaps your monitor is so large that there's plenty of room for the desktop to show through, even with lots of windows open. If so, you're going to love this technique for customizing your desktop in some very cool ways. And if you do keep your screen cluttered like I do, this technique might impress you so much that you change your ways.

STEP 1: USE DESKTOP PICTURES

This technique starts slowly and works up to the good stuff. You may have noticed that Apple provides a selection of images you can use to replace the default swirly blue pattern. If you haven't experimented with the other available pictures, that's a good place to begin. To replace your desktop pattern, do the following:

- Open System Preferences and click the **Desktop** icon. The window shown in **Figure 13.3** appears. Under the words **Current Desktop Picture** is a miniature version of your current desktop pattern.
- The pop-up **Collections** menu lists several sets of images. When you choose a new collection, thumbnails of the pictures in that set appear in the list below. Scroll through each one of the lists to see the sample pictures. To try out one on your desktop, simply click it once and it will immediately appear in the background. (Notice that some of the images are wider than others — these are intended for wide-format displays like the Cinema Display, wide-screen iMac G4, or PowerBook G4.)
- To cycle through all the pictures in a certain collection automatically, click **Change picture** and choose how frequently you want the pictures to change. Check **Random order** to mix things up a bit.

After a while, you're bound to get tired of ladybugs, dewdrops, and swirly blue patterns. It's time to replace Apple's pictures with ones of your own.

- If you store your digital photos in your Pictures folder, choose **Pictures Folder** from the **Collections** menu to display thumbnails of your own photos. More likely, your photos are organized in subfolders within the iPhoto Library within your Pictures folder. To choose a folder of photos there (or anywhere else), click **Choose folder**, and navigate to where your photos are stored, as shown in **Figure 13.4**.
- As before, you can set a single image or create a slide show of your family vacation by adjusting the **Change picture** settings.

13.3

13.4

If you can see enough of your desktop to appreciate it, having pictures of your friends, family, or last weekend's car show cycling on your desktop can be very cool. But you can do better still!

STEP 2: USE A DESKTOP SCREEN SAVER

After the novelty of a desktop slide show has worn off, it's time to move up to the heavy-duty stuff: desktop animations.

You've probably noticed that Mac OS X includes a built-in screen saver. The Screen Effects pane of System Preferences allows you to choose and configure screen saver settings. Screen savers, of course, are animated — either subtly, like the gently panning, zooming, and crossfading Beach or Forest, or not-so-subtly, like the psychedelic Flurry setting. You can also, of course, use the same Pictures folder (or another folder of your own graphics) for a dynamic, animated super-slide-show presentation.

One of the coolest hacks to circulate around the Internet has been a very simple one-line command to display your selected screen saver as your desktop pattern — animation and all!

Open your Terminal application. Type the following all on one line, with no spaces after the / characters (and paying careful attention to the capitalization). Then press Return.

```
/System/Library/Frameworks/
ScreenSaver.framework/Resources/
ScreenSaverEngine.app/Contents/
MacOS/ScreenSaverEngine -background &
```

You should now have your screen saver running on your desktop, much like that shown in **Figure 13.5**. Cool, eh?

■ Unless you have a *very* fast computer and a *very* expensive graphics card, you'll probably notice that running a screen saver on your desktop slows down the other programs on your computer considerably. To stop the screen saver desktop, go back to Terminal and enter the following and then press **Return**:

```
killall -m "ScreenSaver"
```

■ If you don't want to have to type all that every time you turn on or off your desktop screen saver, you could set up aliases to those two commands as described in Technique 3. If you *really* don't like messing around in Terminal and have a spare $12, you can download xBack from Gideon Softworks (`www.gideonsoftworks.com/xback.html`), which adds a friendly icon to your menu bar that allows you to turn desktop screen savers on and off and configure them with ease.

13.5

STEP 3: USE AN EVEN COOLER DESKTOP SCREEN SAVER

But wait, there's more! (Is there an echo in here?) Although desktop screen savers look cool no matter which module you're using, one screen saver is hands-down the most impressive, gotta-have toy. It's called SereneScreen, and it turns your screen into an incredibly realistic virtual aquarium, complete with bubbles and sound effects (if you want them). The wide variety of tropical fish are rendered on-the-fly, and with a high-end graphics card, the effect is absolutely stunning (see **Figure 13.6**.) Is that not groovy?

- You can download a free demo version of SereneScreen from `www.serenescreen.com`; the full version costs $21.95. Although the demo works fine as a regular screen saver, it does *not* work as a desktop background. The full licensed version does, however, and it's well worth the money just to see the expressions on your coworkers' faces when they notice fish swimming behind your hard drive icons!

13.6

TECHNIQUE 14

GETTING MORE FROM AQUA WITH HIDDEN PREFERENCES

14.1

14.2

ABOUT THE FEATURE

The Finder — as well as the Dock and other programs — include hidden settings that enable interesting new features. With a little exploration, you can tap into this extra power.

I'm going to let you in on the worst-kept secret in Mac OS X. You can customize a large number of features far beyond the options in Preferences dialogs — all without any special tools or programming knowledge — if you just know where to look (and you will momentarily). Mac OS X makes exploring and tweaking the Finder and other applications much easier than they ever were in the Mac OS 9 days. It also allows you to discover some features that were always present but not visible in the user interface.

In this technique, you'll learn about two key ways of customizing the hidden features of Mac OS X. I'll take you through the whole process with the Finder to show you how it's done manually and then show you a free graphical app called TinkerTool that can do many of these things for you with just a few clicks. If there's an easy way, why even mention the hard way? Simple: You're learning techniques here. TinkerTool does a great job of modifying the Finder and the Dock, but you can apply the manual method you learn here to other applications as well.

But, first, I must again warn you: Messing with your system has the potential to, well, mess up your system. I urge you to back up all your work before trying any of this. Better yet, if you can experiment on a special installation of Mac OS X (on a separate drive or partition from your main system — or even on a different computer) you'll have a safety net in case something goes wrong. That warning duly rendered, you can dig in.

STEP 1: EDIT PROPERTY LISTS (THE HARD WAY)

If the thought of fiddling with hidden parts of your operating system that Apple clearly intended to be invisible fills you with dread, you can skip this step and move on to Step 2. If you're curious about the way things work, though, you may find this step interesting.

A *property list* is another name for a preference file. In the old days, each application stored its preferences in a different format, many of which could not be read or edited by any other application. Under Mac OS X, the property lists that store preferences for most applications are simple text files, formatted using a system called XML (for eXtensible Markup Language).

If you opened one of these files in a text editor like TextEdit, you would see something like **Figure 14.3**, which shows a small portion of the Finder's preference file. As you can see, it's not exactly poetry, but there are some plain English words in there, and with a bit of thought, you can probably see what some of the lines mean. Interestingly, this file gives you access to settings that don't appear in Finder Preferences (or anywhere else in the graphical user interface). They're built-in features, but the controls to modify them are hidden in this text file. Even more interestingly, if you want to experiment with these settings, you don't have to wade through XML in a text editor. You can use a much more attractive tool Apple supplies as part of the Developer Tools package called Property List Editor. The preceding file is shown in Property List Editor in **Figure 14.4**. If you were to make changes to this file, save it, and then relaunch the Finder, you would find that the changes took effect exactly as if you had changed them using the Finder Preferences dialog. To modify property lists, do the following:

NOTE

There are other ways to make changes to your hidden preference files besides using Property List Editor. For example, if you know exactly what command to use, you can type a one-line command in Terminal that begins `write defaults com.apple.finder` (followed by some other parameters) to change the settings. I show you this way so that you can easily see where the settings are stored and how they're used.

14.3

■ If you haven't already done so, run the installer on the Developer Tools CD that came with Mac OS X. (If you've already tried out Technique 3, you're good to go.) The **Property List Editor** application you'll be using is part of that installation.
■ Open **Property List Editor**. It's in the **Applications** folder inside the **/Developer** folder.
■ Choose **Open** from the **File** menu, type the following in the Go box (with no space after the / character), and click **Open**:

```
~/Library/Preferences/
com.apple.finder.plist
```

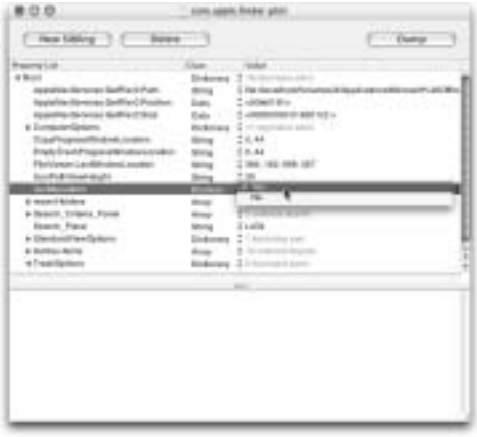
■ When the new window opens, click the disclosure triangle next to **Root**; you'll see something like **Figure 14.4**. This is the Finder's preference file. Some of the items in here might make no sense to you at all, but others will be fairly obvious.

The first thing you're going to do is add a **Quit** command to the Finder. It doesn't normally have one because it's supposed to be running all the time. But there are times you might want to be able to turn it off temporarily (like when you're playing with Finder settings).

■ Click any of the items under Root to enable the **New Sibling** button. Click **New Sibling**, and in the new field that appears, enter **QuitMenuItem**. Click in the **Class** column to display a pop-up menu of field classes; choose **Boolean**, which simply means this is a "yes/no" (or on/off) value. Then click in the **Value** column to display another pop-up menu of available values; choose **Yes** from this menu, as in **Figure 14.5**.
■ Save the file by choosing **Save** from the **File** menu. (You can leave the file open.)
■ Choose **Force Quit** from the Apple menu (or press ⌘+**Option**+**Esc**). When the Force Quit window appears, select **Finder** and click **Relaunch**. (Don't worry, this is perfectly safe.) Your Finder quits and restarts in the background.
■ When all your icons reappear, click the Finder icon in the Dock to bring it to the front. Click on the Finder's **File** menu, and behold! It now has a **Quit** command. You will use this command shortly.

Congratulations! You just performed your first Finder hack. Read on to make a few more easy changes.

14.4



14.5

■ Back in Property List Editor, repeat the New Sibling procedure by adding an item called **AppleShowAllFiles**. Once again, this is a Boolean on/off switch. Entering **Yes** for the Value makes the Finder display all files, even ones that are invisible, like the hidden files that make up the UNIX layer of Mac OS X. (See **Figure 14.6.**)

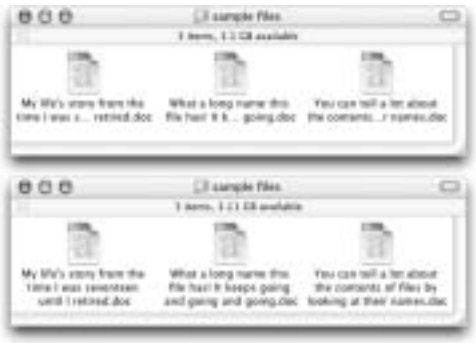
■ Add a sibling called **MaximumLabelLines**. This time the Class is a number. This number is the maximum number of lines that will be used to display file and folder names when you're in Icon View. If you have some really long filenames, two lines might not be enough to display them, resulting in part of the name being cut off. Enter **1, 2,** or **3** in the Value column. (Although you can enter any number you want, the Finder will never display more than three lines.) **Figure 14.7** shows a folder containing some long filenames before and after applying this change.

■ The last change you'll make is to turn off Zoom Rectangles. As you may have noticed, opening an application causes an animation effect that looks a bit like a rectangle springing out of the spot where you clicked to fill the screen. If you find this animation annoying, you can use a hidden preference to turn it off. Enter a new sibling called **ZoomRects**. Make it a Boolean item with a Value of **No**.

WARNING

Being able to see hidden files in the Finder can be educational — and occasionally useful — but if you accidentally delete some of these files, you can cause serious damage to your system. This is one setting I recommend turning on only when you need it and then turning it off again.

14.6



14.7

- As before, save the file. You're finished in Property List Editor, so you can also quit the application now.
- Now switch to the Finder. Before your changes can take effect, you'll need to quit it and restart it. Conveniently, your Finder now has a **Quit** menu command on the **File** menu. Choose it now. This time, the Finder may not restart on its own. If not, click the Finder icon in the Dock to relaunch it.

Enjoy your new Finder features! If you ever want to return to your defaults, follow the procedures in this step again and replace your new values with the old ones.

Using this same technique, you can examine and modify other preference files. The Dock, for instance, has some interesting hidden preferences (found in com.apple.dock.plist), which you modify by other means in Technique 15. Before modifying any other preference files, make a backup copy — just so you can restore the file to its previous state if you accidentally make a change that has unexpected results.

STEP 2: USE TINKERTOOL (THE EASY WAY)

If you want to save yourself a few steps, a freeware application called TinkerTool can make these and many other hidden Finder changes for you using a convenient, friendly graphical interface. TinkerTool can do a great many things, but I talk about just a few here. To use TinkerTool, do the following:

- Go to `www.bresink.de/osx/TinkerTool2.html` and download TinkerTool.
- Double-click and run the installer.
- When installation has finished, System Preferences opens automatically. Click the TinkerTool icon (at the bottom under **Other**), and you'll see the TinkerTool pane, as shown in **Figure 14.8**.
- The Finder tab includes controls to change the same settings you modified earlier. Check the appropriate checkboxes to enable or disable zoom rectangles, the display of hidden files, and the Finder's **Quit** menu command. To change the number of lines used to display filenames, make a selection from the **Icon View** pop-up menu. Another option is listed here that we didn't edit before: **Disable arrows**. Click this checkbox to hide the display of arrows in Column View to indicate which items (folders and volumes) will display their contents in another column when clicked.
- When you're finished making changes, click **Relaunch Finder** to activate them.

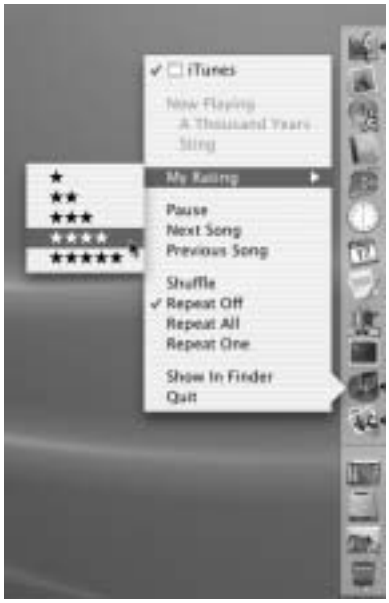
TinkerTool's other tabs allow you to modify additional hidden preferences, including Dock position, scroll bar arrow placement, system font settings, and the language used for Startup and Login screens. If you ever want to restore your preferences to their original, uncustomized state, the Reset tab allows you to do that with one click.

14.8

TECHNIQUE 15

DOCTORING YOUR DOCK

15.1



15.2

ABOUT THE FEATURE

The Dock is one of the most distinctive features of Mac OS X's user interface. Equal parts file launcher, application switcher, status indicator, and eye candy, the Dock wears many hats, but can also do much more than meets the eye.

In Mac OS 9, lots of interface elements were used for opening files, displaying status, or executing commands. Some examples were the Apple menu, the Application menu, the Control Strip, and the Launcher utility. In Mac OS X, Apple has attempted to bring the best features of all these widgets into one place: the Dock.

Most people who see the Dock for the first time think, "Wow, that's cool! Look at those large, beautiful icons! Watch that snazzy "genie" minimizing effect! And ooh, see the way those icons grow and shrink as I move the mouse over them!" After a while, though, it's easy to become frustrated with the Dock. You might find, for example, that it gets in your way as you try to do your work or that it doesn't have all the functionality you were hoping for. Fear not, for in this technique, you learn how to customize the

Dock to within an inch of its life, replacing annoyance with utility — and having a bit of fun in the process. To make this process even more interesting, you do all of this without opening System Preferences even once!

STEP 1: REMOVE ICONS YOU DON'T USE

Before you do anything else to the Dock, or even decide how large or on what part of the screen it will be, you should decide what goes in it. Out of the box, as shown in **Figure 15.3**, your Dock contains icons for the Finder and Trash (which can never be removed), System Preferences, and a handful of important applications such as Mail, Internet Explorer, and iTunes. However, you can freely remove any icons you don't use regularly — knowing that you can add them back later if you change your mind. The first step to having a useful Dock is to weed out icons you don't use often.

- The first icon you can remove is the one next to the Trash — it looks like an @ symbol on a spring. Clicking this icon simply takes you to the Mac OS X page on Apple's Web site. Because there are lots of other ways to get there, there's no need to keep this icon. Click and drag it off the Dock, and a little "poof" animation will confirm its deletion.
- Next, consider removing the QuickTime Player icon (the blue Q). Although you might use QuickTime Player frequently, if you're like most people, you'll rarely, if ever, need to open it manually. Instead, you'll probably double-click movies and other media files you've downloaded, opening the QuickTime Player automatically. So drag off the blue Q as well.

15.3

- System Preferences is another application you may use frequently, but opening System Preferences with a single click is always easy — it's on your Apple menu. You don't need to have it in your Dock as well.
- A couple of the icons are used to open iApps that require special hardware. If you use them frequently, having them in the Dock can be handy, but if not, consider removing them. If you don't have a digital camcorder, you probably don't use iMovie (the clapboard icon) very often, so you can remove that icon. Likewise, the iPhoto icon (the camera in front of a photograph) is primarily useful to those with digital cameras, and if you don't have one, you probably won't be using iPhoto very often. Remember, if you get new toys later and want to add these applications back into your Dock, doing so is a piece of cake.

I'll let you decide about the rest of the icons. As a general rule, if you don't use a particular application at least once a week, it's probably not a good use of space in your Dock. If you use it several times a day, you'll be very glad to have it there.

STEP 2: ADD USEFUL ICONS TO YOUR DOCK

The next step is to add to your Dock icons for applications and other files you need very frequent access to — that is, more frequent than the icons you just removed! In addition, you add some special icons that may not be obvious, but which can save you lots of extra clicking.

- To add an item to the Dock, just locate the file or folder you want and drag its icon into your Dock. All applications must go on the left side of the vertical line; everything else (like files, folders, and URLs) goes on the right side. Apart from that limitation, you can put your new icons anywhere

you want; the other icons will scoot out of the way as you add new ones. You can also rearrange icons at any time by clicking and dragging them to another spot in the Dock. Try this now with any random file, and if it's not one you want to keep in the Dock, you can drag it right off again.

- Consider the applications you use frequently. Perhaps you use Microsoft Office and work in Word, Excel, and Entourage all day long. Or perhaps you're a designer constantly switching among Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign. Whatever your work style, decide on the applications you use the most. Look through your Applications folder (and any other folders within the Applications folder) and add your most frequently used apps — but no more than five or six — to the Dock now.
- Next think about individual folders that you access frequently, like your home folder, your Documents folder, or perhaps a document you're working on over a long period of time. Drag these to your Dock as well (remembering that they need to go on the right side of the vertical divider). Again, don't overdo it — too much clutter defeats the purpose of the Dock, which is simplicity. **Figure 15.4** shows a Dock customized with a new set of applications and folders.
- Now for some less-than-obvious goodies. First, you can actually drag your hard drive icon into the Dock (**Figure 15.5**). As you will see in a moment, by doing this, you can get one-click access to most of your files with a handy pop-up menu. If you find yourself constantly clicking to open and close windows, this can be a great timesaver. As with other non-application icons, your hard drive will go on the right side.
- Finally, my favorite: Put your desktop in the Dock, as shown in **Figure 15.6**. Although it may not look like it, your desktop is actually a special folder, and you can display all the files on your desktop in a regular window. You can also add this folder to the Dock, allowing you to see and open files on your desktop, even when you have so many other windows open that you can't see the desktop at all! To do this, open your home folder (the folder in the Users folder with your user name), find the **Desktop** icon, and drag it into the Dock — on the right side, of course.

15.4

15.5

15.6

STEP 3: ORIENT AND SIZE THE DOCK

When you first install Mac OS X, the Dock appears full-size at the bottom of your screen. If you have a Cinema Display (lucky you!) or multiple monitors, this might be fine. But for the average user with a single monitor at 1024 × 768 pixels, it's a terrible use of screen real estate. Because your monitor is wider than it is tall, you need to make the most of the vertical space you have available, and having the Dock use up so much of it leaves you with very little room for your own stuff. Luckily, this is easy to change.

- The easiest way to change the size of your Dock is to move your pointer to the thin vertical line that separates your applications from everything

else. As you can see in **Figure 15.7**, the pointer shape changes to a bar with arrows above and below. Now you can simply click and drag up or down to change the size of your Dock. It's possible to make it very tiny indeed, if that is your preference.

- Your Dock does not need to go at the bottom of the screen — you may prefer to have it on the left or right edge instead, where space is at less of a premium. To orient your Dock vertically on the side of the screen, move your pointer to the vertical line again so that it changes to the double-arrowed bar. Now hold down the Shift key, then click and drag up and to the right to position it on the right, or drag up and to the left to position it on the left.

By default, your Dock will be centered on the edge of the screen where you've positioned it. But it's also possible to make it stick to one corner — for example, the lower-right corner — so that it will grow out to the left (if it's on the bottom) or toward the top (if it's on the right). This feature can make finding icons like the Trash easier, because they'll always be in the same position on the screen no matter how many other items you add to the Dock.

- To make your Dock stick to the right or bottom corner, open a Terminal window and type (all on one line, with a space between "dock" and "pinning")

```
defaults write com.apple.dock
     pinning end
```

- To make your Dock stick to the left or top corner, open a Terminal window and type (all on one line)

```
defaults write com.apple.dock
     pinning start
```

You need to quit and restart the Dock in order to see your changes. You can do this either by logging out and logging back in or by typing

```
killall "Dock"
```

If you want to undo your change to the Dock pinning location at some point, type (all on one line)

```
defaults write com.apple.dock
     pinning middle
```

Figure 15.8 shows a Dock on the right side of the screen, pinned to the bottom corner. One of the

TIP

If you hold down the Option key while resizing your Dock, it will snap to certain fixed sizes at which the icons look best (corresponding to icon dimensions of 16×16, 32×32, 48×48, 64×64, and 128×128 pixels). For reference, the next-to-smallest fixed size (32×32) is the size all icons were in Mac OS 9. Don't they seem small now?

15.7

15.8

advantages of keeping your Dock in the lower-right corner is that your Trash will always stay put in the same corner of the screen where it always used to be.

STEP 4: RIGHT-CLICK DOCK ICONS

Most people use the Dock only for opening and switching applications. But its capabilities go way beyond that. Every item in your Dock is also a pop-up menu, with contents that vary depending on what type of item it is, and — if it's an application — whether it's running.

Ordinarily, the pop-up menus only display if you click and hold the mouse button on an icon for about a second. But you can avoid that delay with a right-click.

- For instantaneous access to Dock menus, right-click the icon with your multi-button mouse (or Control+click if you're using a one-button mouse).

Here are some examples of what you'll see on the menus:

- All running applications show a list of their open windows. So if you have Word running in the background with ten windows open, you can jump directly to the window you want by right-clicking Word's Dock icon and choosing that window name from the pop-up menu.

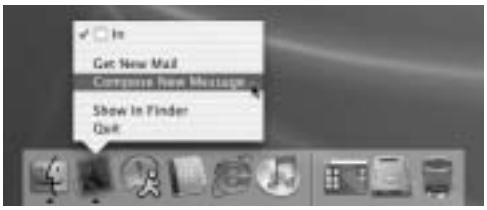
NOTE

There are other ways to edit the hidden Dock preferences that control how it's displayed. One way is to use Property List Editor to modify the com.apple.Dock.plist file, just like you did in Technique 14 for the Finder. Another way is to use the freeware TinkerTool application (also discussed in Technique 14) to edit these settings in a graphical interface.

- The commands **Show in Finder** and **Quit** also appear on applications' pop-up menus. Choose **Show in Finder** to open the window containing the application's icon, or **Quit** to quit the application without first switching to it. (If an application isn't responding, you can press the Option key while clicking the icon to change **Quit** to **Force Quit**; this method is quicker than pressing **⌘+Option+Escape** and choosing the application from a list.)
- Most applications show additional commands in their pop-up menus. Mail, for example, as shown in **Figure 15.9**, enables you to Get New Mail or Compose New Message without switching to the application first. Meanwhile, iTunes shows you the name of the current artist and song along with numerous other controls. Some applications have dozens of options available. Experiment with the ones you use to see what commands are available.

TIP

By using modifier keys (like ⌘ and Option) while clicking Dock icons, you can selectively show and hide applications, display the application icon in the Finder, and other neat tricks. These and other Dock shortcuts are listed in Appendix A.



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- If you have a volume (like your hard drive) or a folder (like your desktop folder or home folder) in the Dock, right-clicking or Control+clicking displays a hierarchical menu of all the files and folders inside it. This means that with a single click, you can open nearly any file, even if it's buried several levels deep. One caveat, however: Pop-up Dock menus only go five levels deep.

STEP 5: USE MAGNIFICATION AND HIDING

If you place a lot of icons on your Dock, it shrinks in order to accommodate them all. Even if you took a more conservative approach and have only a few Dock icons, you may want to keep your Dock small to save precious screen space. If the icons get too small, though, it can be difficult to tell what they are (not to mention difficult to click them accurately). Dock magnification can solve this problem.

- To turn on magnification, choose **Dock** from the Apple menu and choose **Icon Magnification** from the submenu. As your pointer enters the Dock, the nearest icon will grow to full size, and the ones on either side will scale partway up. See **Figure 15.10** for an example. When you move the pointer away from the Dock, they all return to normal size. (Be aware that if you have your Dock anchored to a corner, magnification will cause some icons to disappear off the edge of the screen momentarily.)
- To turn off magnification, once again choose **Icon Magnification** from the **Dock** submenu.

If even very small icons take up too much space for your taste or are too distracting, you can hide the Dock altogether. Even when it's hidden, it's still running, though, and will reappear instantly when your mouse approaches the edge of the screen where it's positioned.

- To turn on Hiding, choose **Dock** from the Apple menu and choose **Automatically Hide the Dock** from the submenu (or press ⌘+**Option**+**D**). To turn off Hiding, repeat this step.

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STEP 6: CUSTOMIZE APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

If you have the hang of using the Dock and are still hungry for more, a number of downloadable programs can take you even further.

- Try out TinkerTool, the free preference pane mentioned in Technique 14; it can perform several Dock modifications for you quickly and safely with a friendly graphical interface — including the stick-to-a-corner trick used earlier. You can find it at `www.bresink.de/osx/TinkerTool2.html`.
- To customize your Dock further, try the shareware program TransparentDock, available from `www.freerangemac.com/pages/software.html` for a mere $8. In addition to the Dock-related features of TinkerTool, TransparentDock allows you to change the color and transparency level of the background, border, and even the application arrows on your Dock.

And that's just the beginning. You can replace the Poof effect with your own animation, display hidden files in pop-up menus, or — my very favorite feature — eliminate the five-levels-deep feature for hierarchical menus.

- For the ultimate in Dock customization, look no further than Skin a Dock, a $10 shareware program available from `www.ittpoi.com/skinadock.html`. This amazing program allows you to change the overall appearance of your Dock in extreme ways, such as adding flames or grass around the icons or placing each icon in its own bubble. **Figure 15.11** shows two examples.

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TECHNIQUE 16

MOVING BEYOND THE DOCK WITH FILE LAUNCHERS

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ABOUT THE FEATURE

File launchers are small utilities that make finding and opening your favorite applications, utilities, files, and URLs easy. The Dock can do all of this, too, but a number of third-party alternatives do it better.

If you've read Technique 15, you may be feeling pretty excited about all the things your newly customized Dock can do for you. Now I'm going to turn the tables on you and propose something shocking: You might want to stop using the Dock almost entirely and replace it with something else! Even though the Dock is pretty to look at and can be customized extensively, it remains limited in some important ways. Power users often choose to skip the Dock and use a third-party file launcher utility instead.

What exactly is a file launcher? There's no set answer to this question, but in general, a file launcher is a utility with the following features:

- Opens files, folders, applications, and URLs with one click.
- Allows you to drag and drop files onto its icons to open them.
- Shows you which applications are currently running (a *process viewer*).
- Enables you to group items into categories

The Dock has all these features except the last one, but that's pretty crucial. Although you can, in theory, drag hundreds of items into the Dock, beyond a certain number of items the utility and charm of the Dock drop off rapidly. The Dock's icons become small and difficult to pick out, and even with the magnification feature, using it can be awkward. (On an average-sized monitor, a Dock with more than 25 or 30 icons starts getting pretty crowded.) As this technique shows you, third-party file launchers pick up where the Dock leaves off, allowing you to organize dozens or even hundreds of items for quick and easy access.

Although you can hide the Dock and remove everything except the Finder and the Trash, you can't completely turn it off — at least, not without some serious hacking that might be more harmful than helpful.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A LAUNCHER

Because you're going to be using your file launcher many times a day, choosing one that closely meets your needs pays off. Your first step is to choose a launcher from among the many that are available. Fortunately, you can download and try out any or all of them for free. As you're evaluating file launchers, here are some questions to consider:

- Does it use screen space effectively? A launcher that covers too much of your screen will get in the way of your work. Some launchers always float above your other windows; some appear or disappear when your pointer moves in and out of a certain part of the screen; some behave more like regular windows; and so on. The best launchers allow you to choose the sort of window shape, position, and behavior that suits your needs.
- How easy is it to customize? Although you can customize every launcher in one fashion or another, some make it very easy whereas others require a series of awkward steps.
- Does it offer keyboard shortcuts? This feature may or may not be important for you, but some launchers offer the option to assign keyboard shortcuts to individual items, for another way of opening them if using the keyboard is more convenient than clicking.
- What does it look like? Some launchers have highly customizable appearances (sometimes called *skins*) that can adapt to your personality; others have just one set look. Some offer Aqua-friendly drop shadows, transparency, and rounded edges; others have a more distinctive appearance. Your launcher will be a regular fixture on your screen, so choose one you'll enjoy looking at.

With these thoughts in mind, here is a sampling of the best-known (and arguably the best) third-party launchers you can find. (For more choices, visit `www.versiontracker.com` and search the Mac OS X area for "launcher.")

- Aladdin's DragStrip ($20, `www.aladdinsys.com/dragstrip`) has been around for many years and is now available in a fully Mac OS X–native form. This relatively conventional launcher arranges your shortcuts on a series of tabs within a floating window. DragStrip is shown in **Figure 16.3**. DragStrip is easy to use but relatively light on features and customizability. Unlike the other two launchers mentioned here, DragStrip doesn't allow you to display a hierarchical menu showing the contents of folders and volumes on its tabs.

■ Drop Drawers X ($20, `www.sigsoftware.com/dropdrawers/`) is an unusual and visually striking launcher that has many enthusiastic fans. Instead of windows or palettes, Drop Drawers X places tabs on any edge of your screen. Move your pointer to a tab to slide out a drawer (as in **Figure 16.4**). A drawer can contain not only applications but also just about any type of content, including text snippets, URLs, movies, aliases, and even a Trash icon. (Thus, it can also serve as a kind of pasteboard or scrapbook for various sorts of information.) A Process Drawer shows just currently running applications. Drop Drawers X has extensive customization options, but has a steeper learning curve than DragStrip or DragThing (mentioned next).

■ Last but not least is my favorite, DragThing ($25, `www.dragthing.com`). Like DragStrip, it can display shortcuts of all kinds as icons on floating palettes. Like Drop Drawers X, its multi-tabbed windows can be turned into pop-out drawers at the edges of your screen (as shown in **Figure 16.5**). And like the others, it contains an optional process viewer window. Where DragThing really shines is in the depth of its interface choices. Nearly any size, shape, color, texture, or configuration of launcher you can dream up can be created with DragThing. Although it has a vast number of customization options, I find it more intuitive and easier to use than the other two.

16.3

One minor caveat: Three of the Dock's features do not (yet) appear in any third-party launcher. First, it uses badges for certain icons to give you additional information. An example of this is the Mail icon in the Dock, which displays the number of unread

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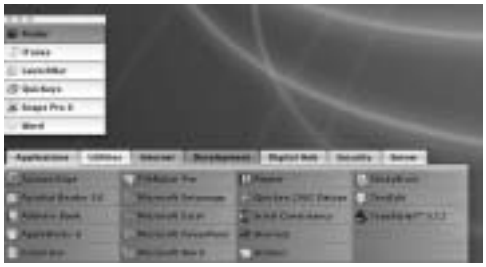

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messages (see **Figure 16.6**) without requiring you to switch to the Mail application. Second, by right-clicking (or Control+clicking) the Dock icon of a running application, you can display a menu of open windows and other commands you can activate without having to switch to the application first. Finally, only the Dock (by way of its bouncing icons) lets you know when an application is in the process of launching. The good news is that because you can't entirely replace the Dock, it will still offer all these capabilities for your running applications. You can continue to use your Dock for what it's best at and use another launcher for everything else.

STEP 2: ORGANIZE YOUR LAUNCHER ITEMS

Now that you've chosen a launcher, what do you do with it? Well, it's time to load it up with your stuff. This is an art, not a science, so all I can offer are some general principles to consider:

- You'll invariably want to start by putting your most frequently used applications on your launcher. Applications generally go on a tab by themselves. If you have dozens of applications you use on a regular basis, consider splitting them into several tabs, such as Business Applications, Internet, Utilities, and Games (or whatever makes the most sense to you). An example is shown in **Figure 16.7**.
- Next, add the folders you access most often. This will work best with launchers (like Drop Drawers X and DragThing) that can display the contents of folders in a pop-up menu. Having a custom icon for your folder also helps — see Technique 11 for instructions.
- Think about the files you need to access on a regular basis. The files that you'll find most helpful to have in your launcher are those that you work on over long periods of time — a book or a term paper, for instance — or ones you have to update frequently, such as a schedule or form. You might also include instruction manuals or reference guides in PDF form that you regularly consult.
- Consider adding a few URLs. In many cases, your browser's bookmark menu is a more convenient place to store URLs, but a launcher can give you one-click access to some of your favorites even if your browser isn't already running.

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TIP

All the launchers described in this technique are based on the same metaphor as the Dock: an area of the screen dedicated to launching the items you have manually selected as being important. An entirely different — and much more powerful — paradigm is employed by the highly regarded LaunchBar utility. Although it serves the function of launching files, it does so in a way that does not require *any* space on the screen, relying on the keyboard rather than the mouse. Because it's more keyboard-oriented, LaunchBar is discussed in Technique 19, "Boosting Your Keyboard Efficiency."

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- As you add more items, be careful to limit the number of icons on any given tab. When a tab gets to ten or twelve icons, consider splitting its content into two tabs with more specific titles; for example, "Expense Reports" and "Budget Worksheets" instead of "Spreadsheets."
- Finally, do *not* try to put every icon you can think of in your launcher. If all you're doing is duplicating the contents of your Applications folder, for example, you're missing the point of a launcher — quick, easy access to the items you use most often. A launcher that's cluttered with too many items won't save you any time or effort. Concentrate on the items you use most frequently — or have to dig the most to find.

STEP 3: CUSTOMIZE YOUR LAUNCHER

After the hard work of organizing your applications and files, it's time to have some fun by customizing the appearance of your launcher. Choices like color, pattern, and fonts are purely a matter of personal taste and will depend on the capabilities in the launcher you've chosen. However, here are some practical considerations to keep in mind:

- All things being equal, a larger target is easier to hit than a smaller one. In choosing the size of your icons and views, think about how easy it will be to click the individual items without carefully positioning your pointer.
- Icons, as long as they're distinctive, can be recognized more quickly than text. If you have many identical folder icons, for example, that you can identify only by reading their labels, your eye will always have to read the labels to decide which is the right icon. On the other hand, the eye can easily detect an icon with a unique color or shape, making for faster recognition.
- In contrast to the last two items, text usually takes up less space than icons. If you have a great many items in your launcher and want to keep it from covering half your screen, smaller icons with accompanying text labels — perhaps to the side of the icons, where they use space more efficiently — might do the trick.

STEP 4: PARE DOWN YOUR DOCK

Now that you have a great launcher, what about your Dock? It will still always display the Finder, Trash, and icons for any open applications. But you can remove everything else from it, because all those other icons are already in your launcher. (It can feel sacrilegious or even scary to think about removing everything from your Dock, but just remember: They're only shortcuts. The original applications are still there, and you can add them back to your Dock later any time you want.) As a final touch, if you haven't done so already, move your Dock to an obscure area of the screen, make it smaller, and/or turn on Hiding to keep it out of your way. **Figure 16.8** shows a Dock with only the essentials (and running applications), pinned in the bottom-right corner of the screen using the tricks in Technique 15.

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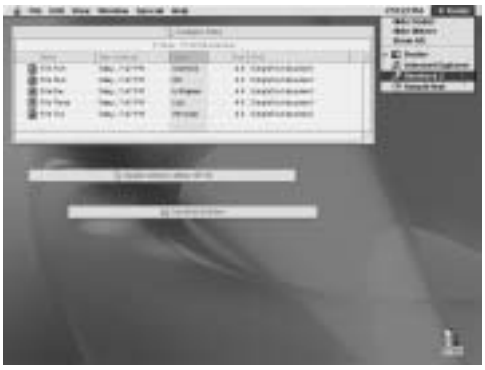
TECHNIQUE 17

RESTORING "MISSING" CLASSIC FEATURES TO MAC OS X



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ABOUT THE FEATURE

Mac OS 9 is dead! Long live Mac OS 9! A number of useful interface features in the Classic Mac OS disappeared in Mac OS X. Clever programmers have found ways to bring some of them back.

No one will dispute that Mac OS X has made tremendous strides in the area of user interface. By comparison, the Platinum look of Mac OS 9 seems old-fashioned and passé. Yet, there's no escaping the fact that Mac OS 9 had some very handy interface features that, for reasons only Apple knows, have not found their way into Mac OS X.

Maybe you're a long-time Mac user who still hasn't gotten used to the new ways of Mac OS X and pines for the good old days. Or maybe you love every drop of Aqua, but still think a few things could be more convenient than they are. Whatever the case, in this technique, I show you how to restore several features to Mac OS X that were once present in Mac OS 9. In most cases, the Mac OS X versions of these features are even better than they were before.

Most of the steps in this technique involve the use of shareware programs. They're all quite inexpensive, though, and considering the tremendous effort these authors have put into making our lives a bit easier, I think every program

mentioned here is well worth the requested fee. If you use these programs beyond the trial period, be sure to register the software and pay the shareware fee.

STEP 1: RESTORE THE APPLE MENU TO ITS FORMER GLORY

Mac OS X's Apple menu displays system-wide commands like System Preferences, Recent Applications and Documents, Restart, and Shut Down. In Mac OS 9, the Apple menu, apart from being more colorful, had a few additional tricks. For one thing, it was possible to add your own files and folders to the Apple menu. Folders displayed their contents in a handy pop-out submenu, providing a way to get one-click access to most of your files (much like you can do now in the Dock).

One of the folders that appeared in the Apple menu automatically was the Control Panels folder. Because each control panel had its own entry in this menu, you could access any one of them with a single click. (See **Figure 17.3.**) By contrast, although Mac OS X's Apple menu has a System Preferences command, it takes another click after the application opens to select the particular pane you want to use — not quite as convenient.

- To make your Apple menu customizable once again, download Unsanity's shareware FruitMenu ($10, `www.unsanity.com`). With FruitMenu installed (see **Figure 17.4**), you can add folders and files to your Apple menu much like you could in Mac OS 9. The hierarchical menus are even better, because they're unlimited in depth. (Mac OS 9 restricted you to five levels.) You can also add any of a large collection of special commands to your Apple menu, such as commands to arrange your windows or display your IP address. Best of all, instead of a single System Preferences command, you get a menu listing each pane, so you can jump to any pane with a single click.

STEP 2: ADD A CLASSIC-STYLE APPLICATION MENU

In Mac OS 9, the right side of the menu bar displayed the Application menu, which in those days meant a list of your running applications. With one click, you could not only switch applications, but also hide all the windows of the current application or hide everything *but* the current application. Although you can achieve similar functionality through a combination of the Dock and the Window menu, it's just not as easy as it once was.

- Download Frank Vercruesse's ASM ($12, `www.vercruesse.de/software`), which brings back the functionality of the old Application menu, as shown in **Figure 17.5**. It actually goes far beyond it, giving you the option

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to display Dock menus in your ASM menu, change icon size, and many other options. If you've never broken the habit of zipping your pointer to the upper-right corner to hide your current application, ASM will be a breath of fresh air.

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STEP 3: REPOSITION SCROLL BAR ARROWS

This very easy step requires no extra software, but removes a major annoyance for people accustomed to Mac OS 9. When you install Mac OS X, you'll notice that the Up and Down arrows on your scroll bars are together at the bottom. Every previous version of the Mac OS, as well as every version of Windows, put the Up arrow at the top and the Down arrow at the bottom — where, I think you'll agree, they make more sense. **Figure 17.6** illustrates the difference.

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■ To put your scroll arrows back where they belong, open System Preferences and click the **General** icon. In the middle section, you'll see **Place scroll arrows**; select the radio button next to **At top and bottom,** as shown in **Figure 17.7**.

STEP 4: MAKE FOLDERS OPEN IN THEIR OWN WINDOWS

By default, every time you double-click a folder icon inside a window, the contents of the new folder replace the previous contents of the window — without opening a new folder. This keeps your screen from becoming crowded with lots of extra windows, but it can be disorienting and confusing if you're used to opening a new window with every new folder.

■ To make all folders open in windows of their own, choose **Preferences** from the Finder's **Finder** menu and check the box next to **Always open folders in a new window** (see **Figure 17.8**).

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STEP 5: RESTORE FINDER LABELS

Although Mac OS X makes sorting files by criteria like name, date modified, and kind easy, Mac OS 9 offered an additional option called Labels. With a simple menu command, you could give any file or folder one of seven user-defined color and name combinations. When you applied a label, the file's color would change, and you could also use your label as a sorting criterion in List View — for example, displaying all the files you've designated as "Hot" at the top of the list, and "Boring" at the bottom.

■ Go visit our friends at Unsanity (`www.unsanity.com`), who have brought back Labels in all their glory with their $10 Labels X, as shown in **Figure 17.9** (CP.6). As with Mac OS 9's Labels, Labels X changes icon color, has user-configurable colors and names, and adds an optional Label column to List View windows.

STEP 6: BRING BACK WINDOWSHADE

Mac OS 9 had a built-in feature called WindowShade. By double-clicking the title bar of any window, you could "roll up" the contents of the window so that only the title bar showed. This feature was very useful for times when lots of windows were open and you needed to reduce screen clutter without closing windows.

In Mac OS X, Apple wants you to use the yellow Minimize button to shrink windows into the Dock if you need to get them out of the way temporarily. The problem with minimizing windows to the Dock is that you can't see the window name unless you highlight the Dock icon. Although the Dock does display a thumbnail, picking out the window you want can be hard if your Dock icons are hidden or very small (or if your window contents aren't easily recognizable at postage-stamp size).

Luckily, Unsanity (`www.unsanity.com`) — the same folks who created FruitMenu and Labels X — have yet another $10 shareware program called WindowShade X that restores WindowShade functionality to Mac OS X.

- To bring back WindowShade functionality, download WindowShade X from the preceding URL, double-click its installer icon, and follow the on-screen instructions. **Figure 17.10** shows WindowShade X in action. In addition to rolling up windows, it can also make them transparent (to a user-selectable degree) among many other features. It's one of my very favorite Mac OS X interface enhancements. Check it out!

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STEP 7: PUT THE TRASH BACK ON THE DESKTOP

Do you miss having a Trash icon on your desktop? Although a lot of third-party utilities you can download will put your Trash back on your desktop, you can also do it yourself very quickly and easily.

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■ To put your own Trash icon on the desktop, flip back to Technique 10 and follow the directions in Step 4.

■ Instead of putting your new Trash icon on a toolbar, move it to the bottom-right corner of the screen — where nature intended it to be (see **Figure 17.11**).

■ To try out your new desktop Trash icon, drag a file onto it, then click the Trash icon in the Dock to confirm that the file was moved there. Remember that your fake Trash icon does not change to show that it has files in it, and even the real Trash icon in the dock might not reflect the change until you click it. In addition, you cannot use the fake Trash icon to eject removable media. However, it's still not bad for five minutes and no money.

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