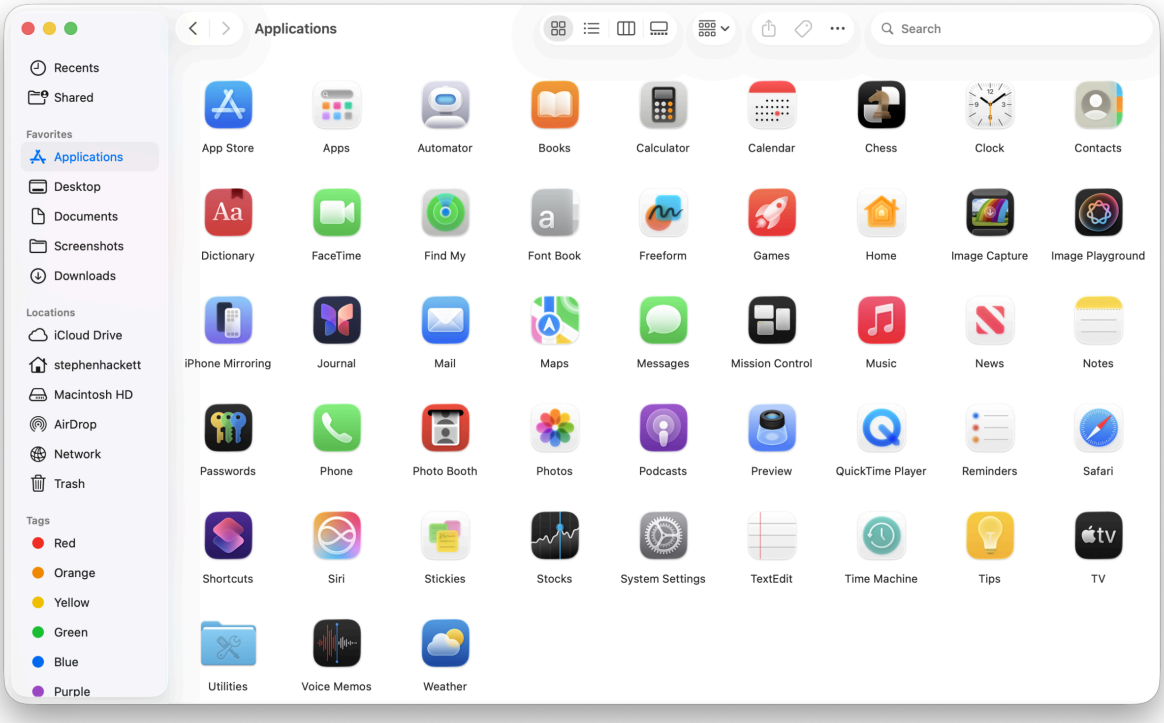
Benjamin Button Reviews macOS

17 September 2025

Apple's first desktop operating system was Tahoe. Like any first version, it had a lot of issues. Users and critics flooded the web with negative reviews. While mostly stable under the hood, the outer shell — the visual user interface — was jarringly bad. Without much experience in desktop UX, Apple's first OS looked like a Fisher-Price toy: heavily rounded corners, mismatched colors, inconsistent details and very low information density. Obviously, the tool was designed mostly for kids or perhaps light users or elderly people.


Apple Account
Search
Stephen Hackett
Apple Account
Wi-Fi
Bluetooth
Network
Battery
General
Accessibility
Appearance
Menu Bar
Apple Intelligence & Siri
Desktop & Dock
Displays
Spotlight
Wallpaper
Stephen Hackett
Personal Information
Sign-In & Security
Payment & Shipping
iCloud
Family
Set Up
Media & Purchases
Sign in with Apple
Devices
appleadmin's MacBook Air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iPhone Mirroring
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Photo Booth
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Podcasts
Preview
QuickTime Player
Reminders
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Shortcuts
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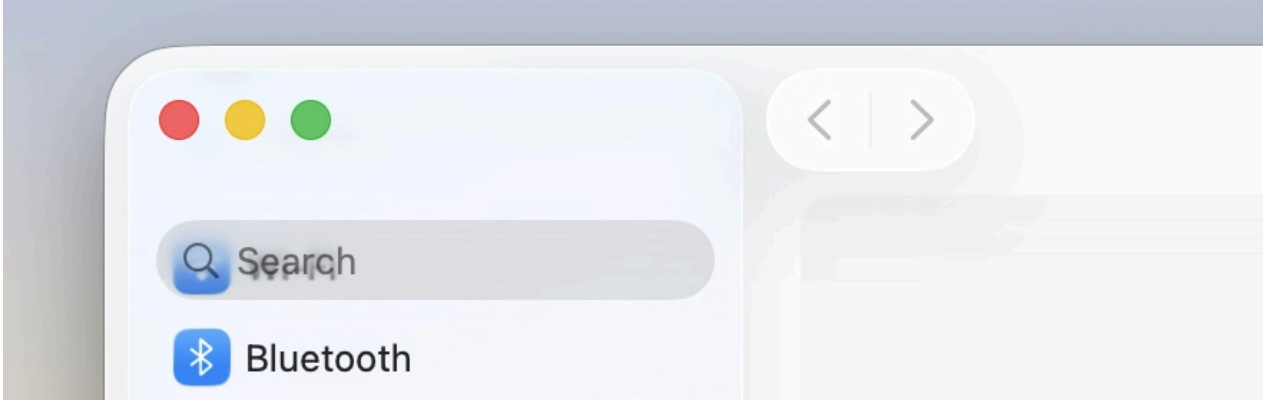
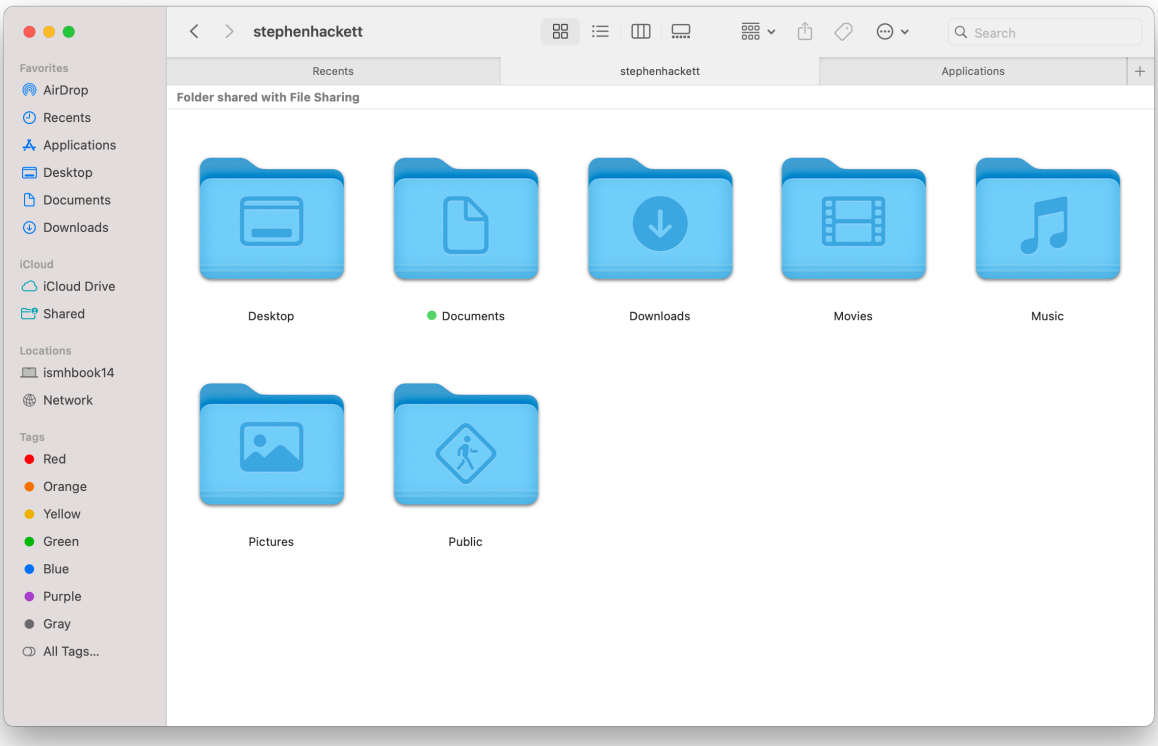
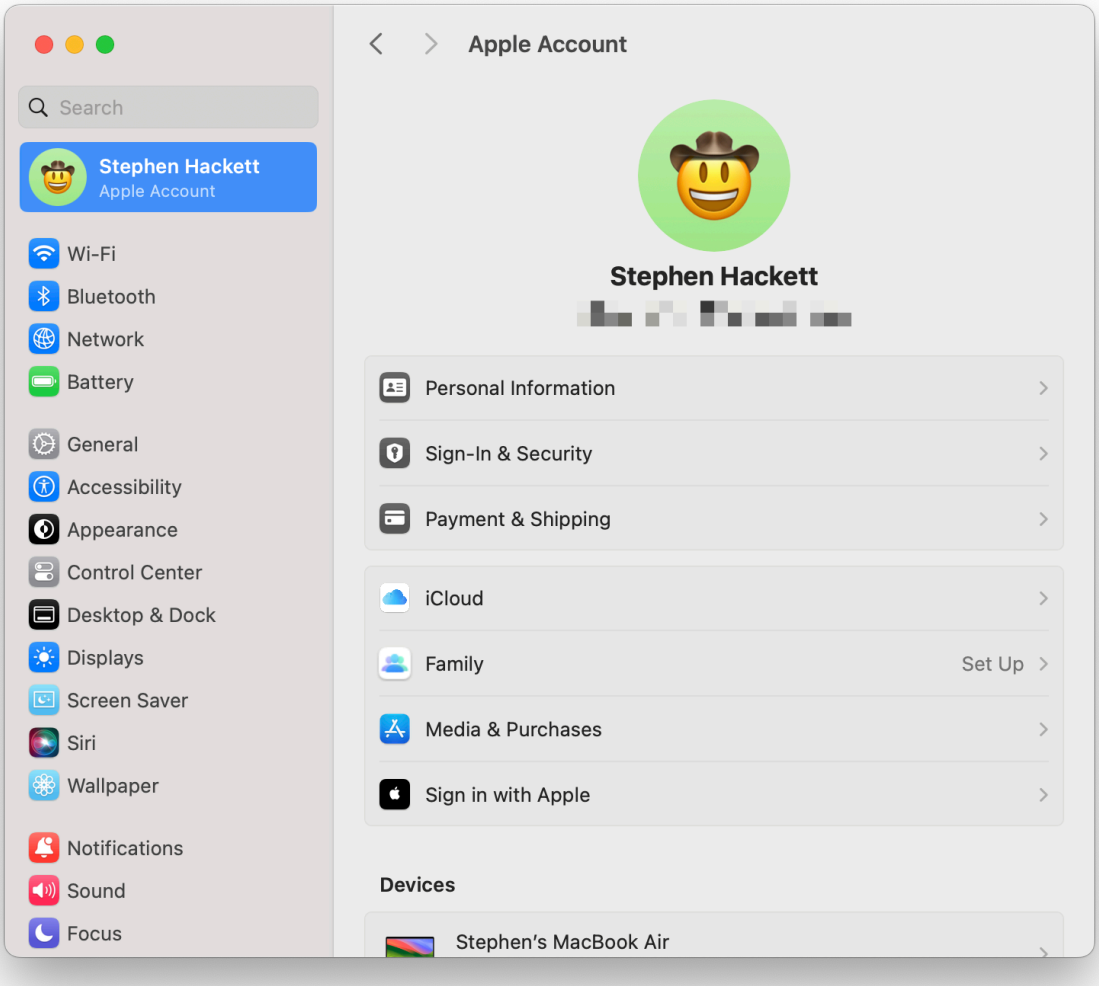


(All images are from the wonderful [macOS Screenshot Library] and the [historic, old review by ars technica].)

Credit where credit is due: Apple had listened to their users and the next version - macOS Sequoia — shipped with lots of fixes. Border radius was heavily reduced, transparent glass-like panels replaced by less transparent ones, buttons made more serious and less toyish. Most system icons made more serious, too, with focus on more detail. Overall, it seemed like the 2nd version was a giant leap from infancy to teenage years.




Search
Stephen Hackett
Apple Account
Wi-Fi
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Appearance
Control Center
Desktop & Dock
Displays
Screen Saver
Siri
Wallpaper
Notifications
Sound
Focus
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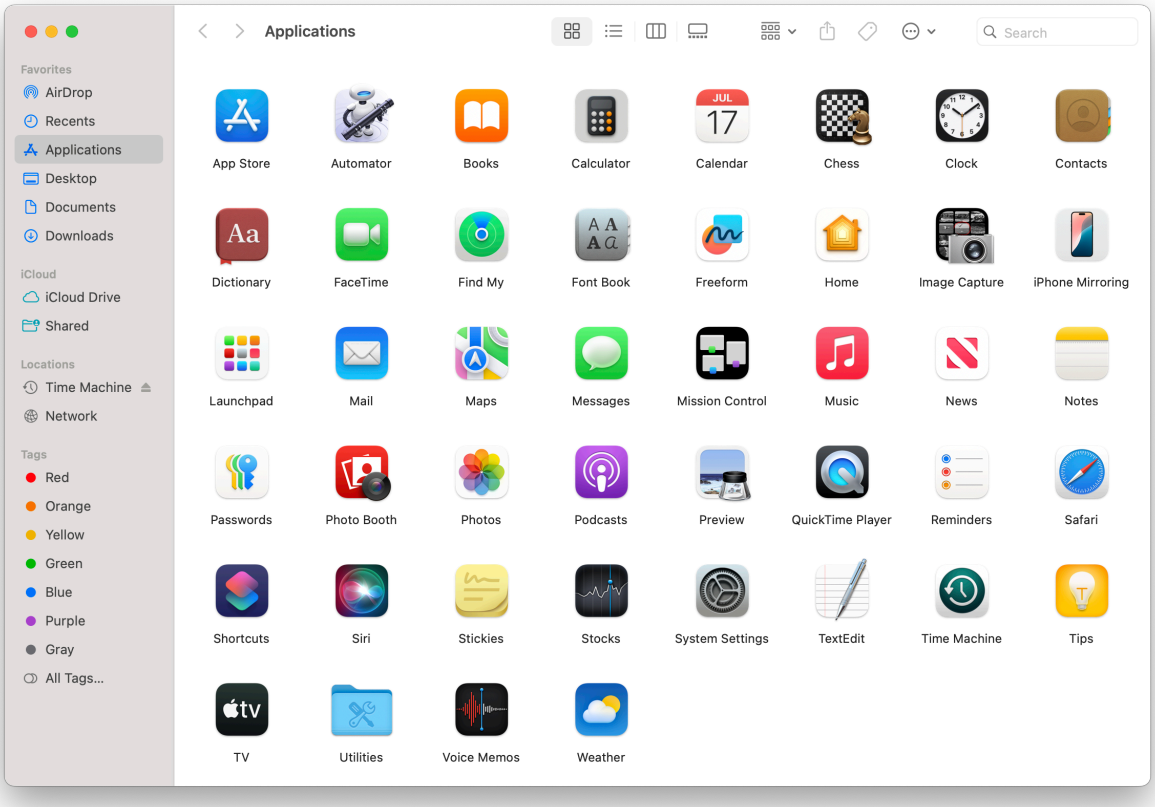
Media & Purchases
Sign in with Apple
Devices
Stephen's MacBook Air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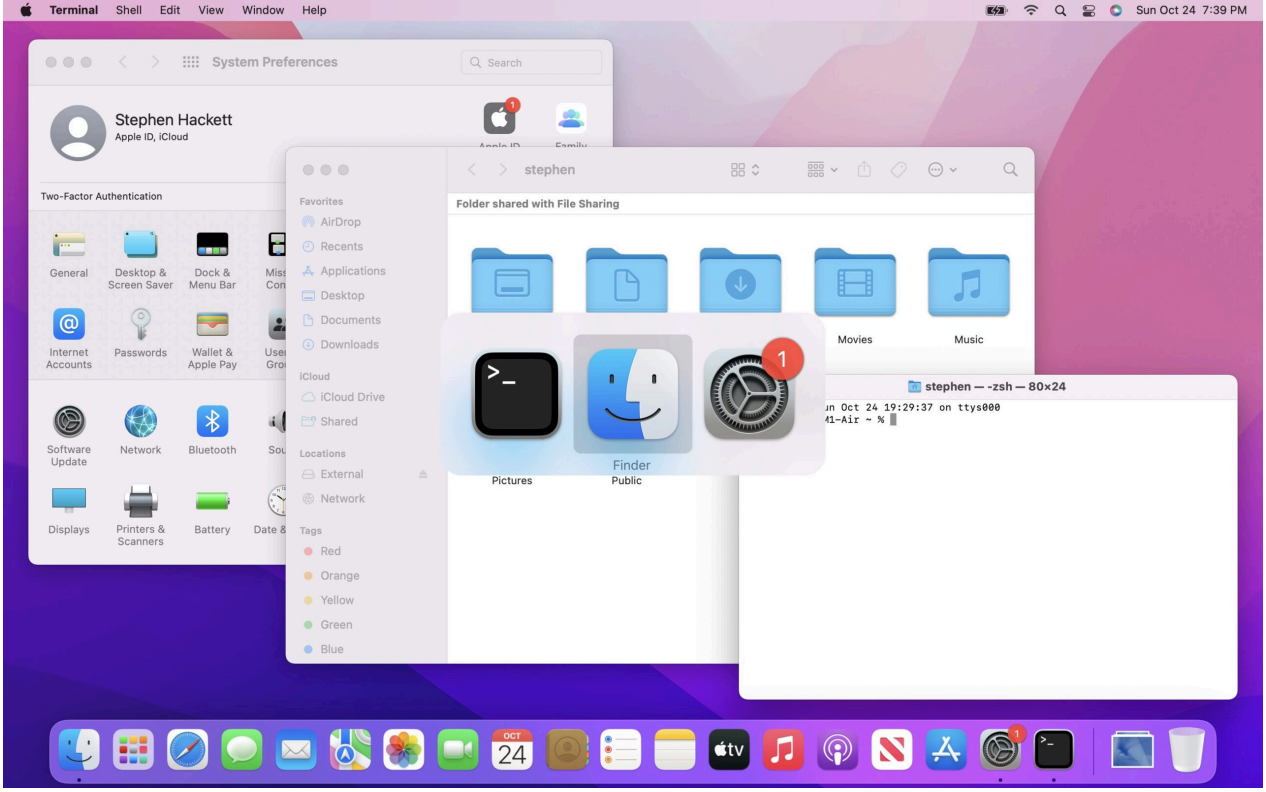
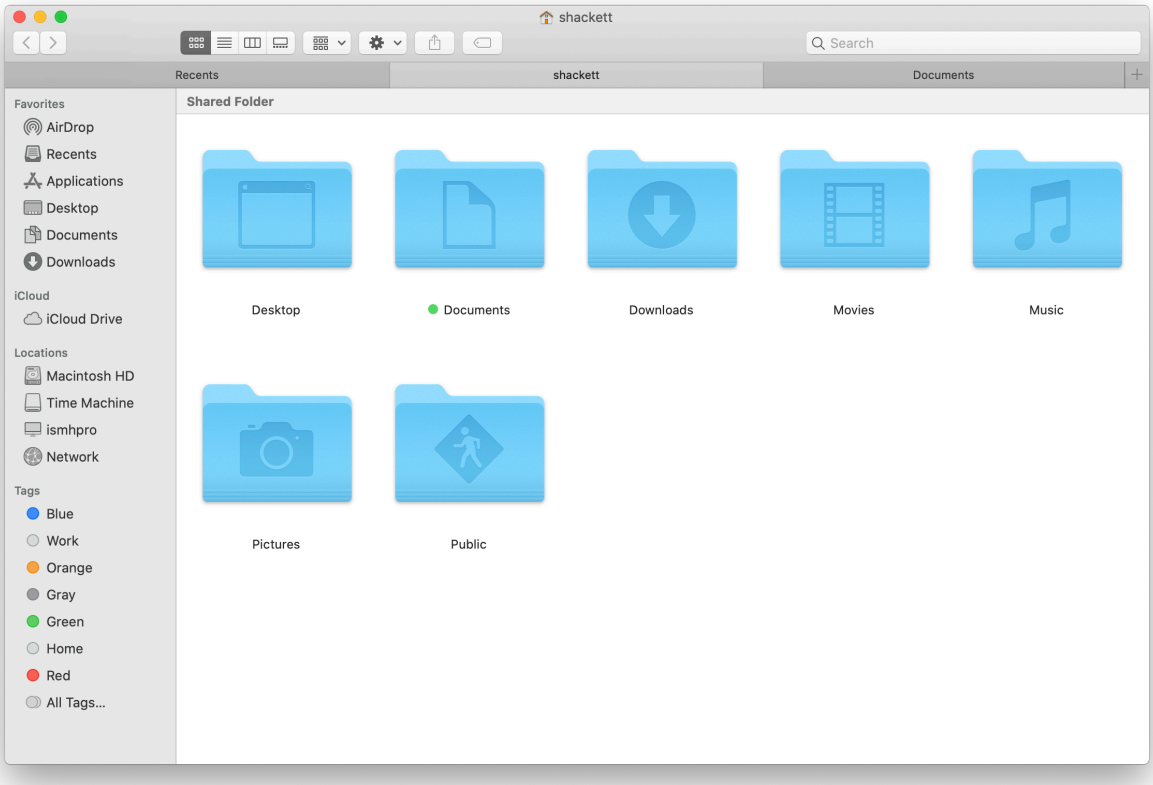
Automator
Books
Calculator
Calendar
Chess
Clock
Contacts
Dictionary
FaceTime
Find My
Font Book
Freeform
Home
Image Capture
iPhone Mirroring
Launchpad
Mail
Maps
Messages
Mission Control
Music
News
Notes
Passwords
Photo Booth
Photos
Podcasts
Preview
QuickTime Player
Reminders
Safari
Shortcuts
Siri
Stickies
Stocks
System Settings
TextEdit
Time Machine
Tips
TV
Utilities
Voice Memos
Weather

The next two releases (Sonoma and Ventura) were relatively minor updates in terms of functionality and UI. The direction was clear, however: Apple's OS was growing in seniority, geared more and more towards professionals who use the computer to get work done rather than leisurely slide photo galleries of portraits of their super model-looking friends.

Next version (Monterey) signaled another big direction that made loyal users very happy: Apple started to deprecate their finicky, unstable SwiftUI framework that reminded everyone of badly-designed javascript-heavy websites, towards more robust native architecture. The biggest change in Monterey was the introduction of a new Settings app. It featured an easy-to-use layout of icons instead of a long list. It was faster and more stable than before. Combined with the growing tendency to use contrast and solid borders around elements, the new Settings app finally felt like a control panel of a professional machine.



After a relatively uneventful Big Sur, the next big version was Catalina. And oh boy, was it big. Gone were blobby, low-contrast panels. Windows gained a highly visible top bar. Checkboxes and other elements continued to grow in confidence, with more prominent borders and better overall visibility. Elements on the screen started to be actually very legible and distinguishable. Buttons, input fields, and other elements in all apps got solid borders and nice contrast. Icons in Finder became gray and serious looking.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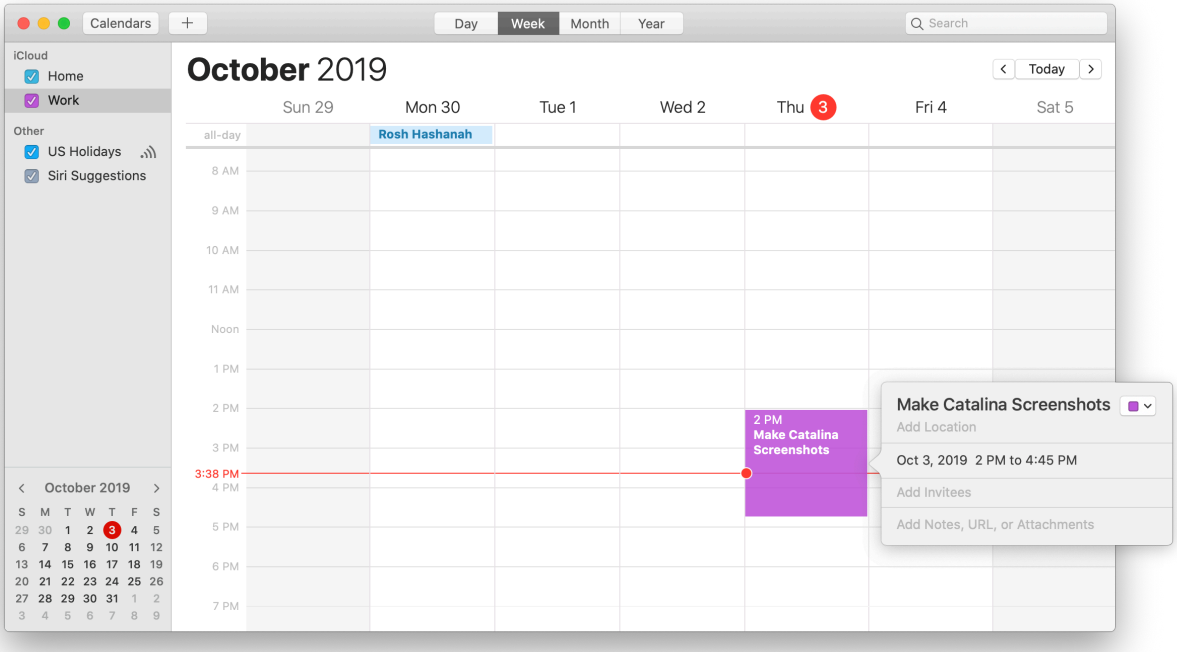
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Siri Suggestions
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Today
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Mon 30
Tue 1
Wed 2
Thu 3
Fri 4
Sat 5
all-day
Rosh Hashanah
8 AM
9 AM
10 AM
11 AM
Noon
1 PM
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4 PM
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6 PM
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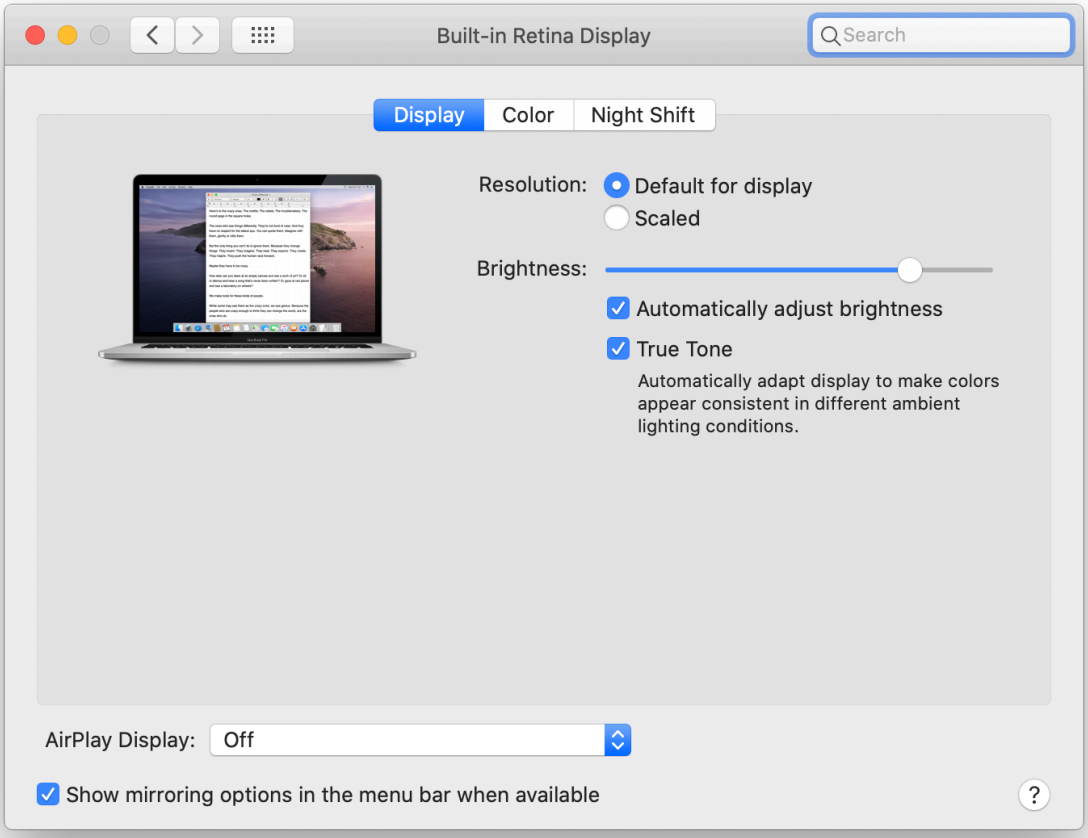
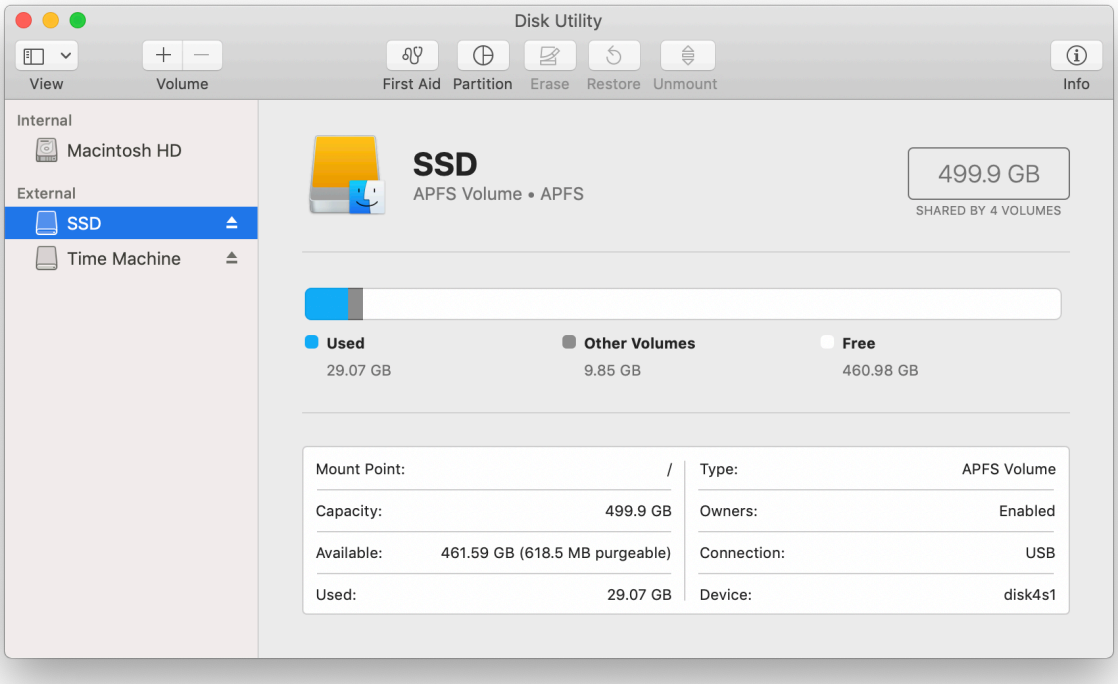
Make Catalina Screenshots
Make Catalina Screenshots
Add Location
Oct 3, 2019 2 PM to 4:45 PM
Add Invitees
Add Notes, URL, or Attachments
October 2019

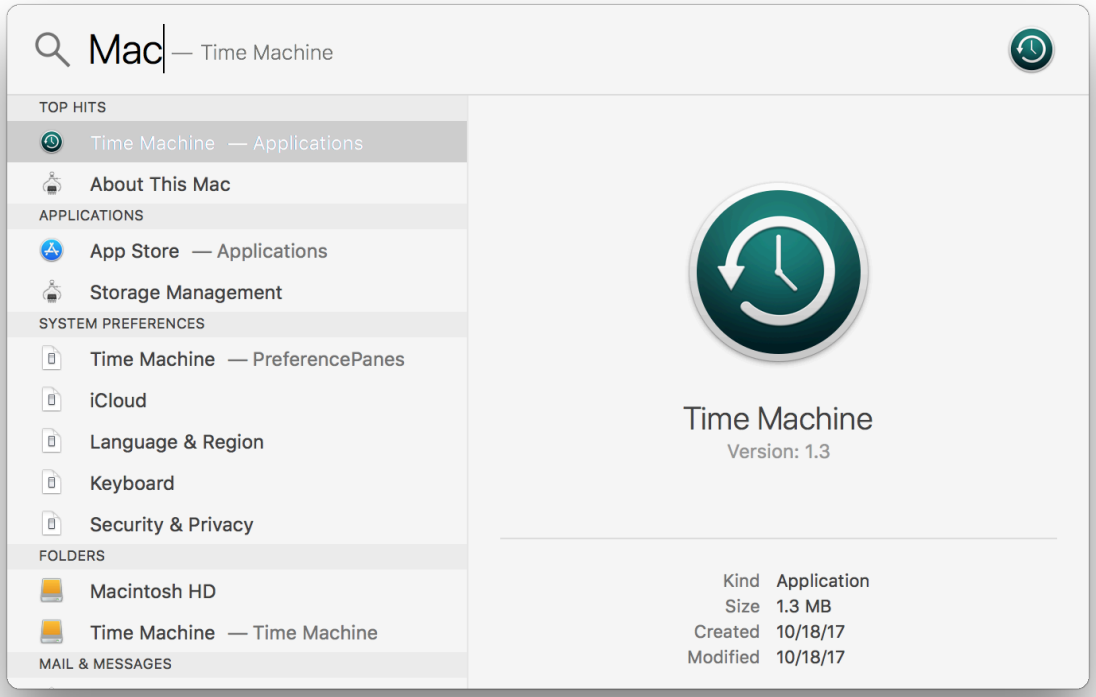


Another huge change in Catalina was in line with Apple's general direction of opening up their platform to allow more people to develop and distribute apps. Starting from Catalina, developers no longer needed to notarize their apps. This meant that anyone in the world could create apps and other people could download and run them — without Apple's approval and without costly and lengthy notarization procedures.

The next one (Mojave) was mostly uneventful, except for one huge change: it could now run 32-bit apps! Up until this point, macOS could only run 64-bit applications, which made a vast catalogue of apps and games impossible to use. Thanks to Mojave, the library of compatible apps grew overnight.



The next release (High Sierra) brought various stability improvements and continued to solidify the serious look and feel of the UX. Generally, compared to the early versions, High Sierra worked snappy, with shorter animations. One big change was that Apple decided to drop support for their "universal" apps, so starting from High Sierra, users could no longer run those modified mobile apps like Home, News, Stocks and Voice memos. This was another clear signal to the market: even though Apple had started their voyage into desktop OSes from the iPhone-centric and entertainment-centric angle, nowadays it is driven by the needs of professionals. Not many people had complained about the removal of iPhone-like Stocks app.


Mac — Time Machine
TOP HITS
Time Machine — Applications
About This Mac
APPLICATIONS
App Store — Applications
Storage Management
SYSTEM PREFERENCES
Time Machine — PreferencePanes
iCloud
Language & Region
Keyboard
Security & Privacy
FOLDERS
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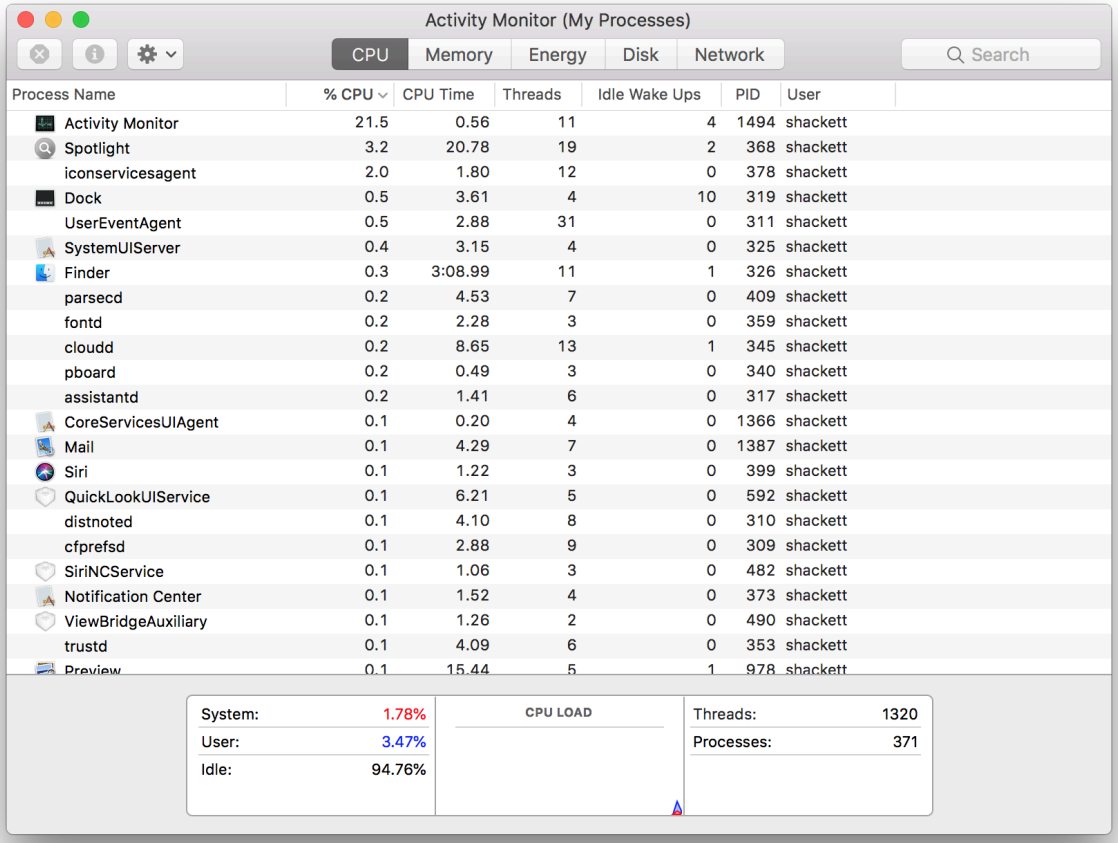
Activity Monitor (My Processes)
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UserEventAgent 0.5 2.88 31 0 311 shackett
SystemUIServer 0.4 3.15 4 0 325 shackett
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fontd 0.2 2.28 3 0 359 shackett
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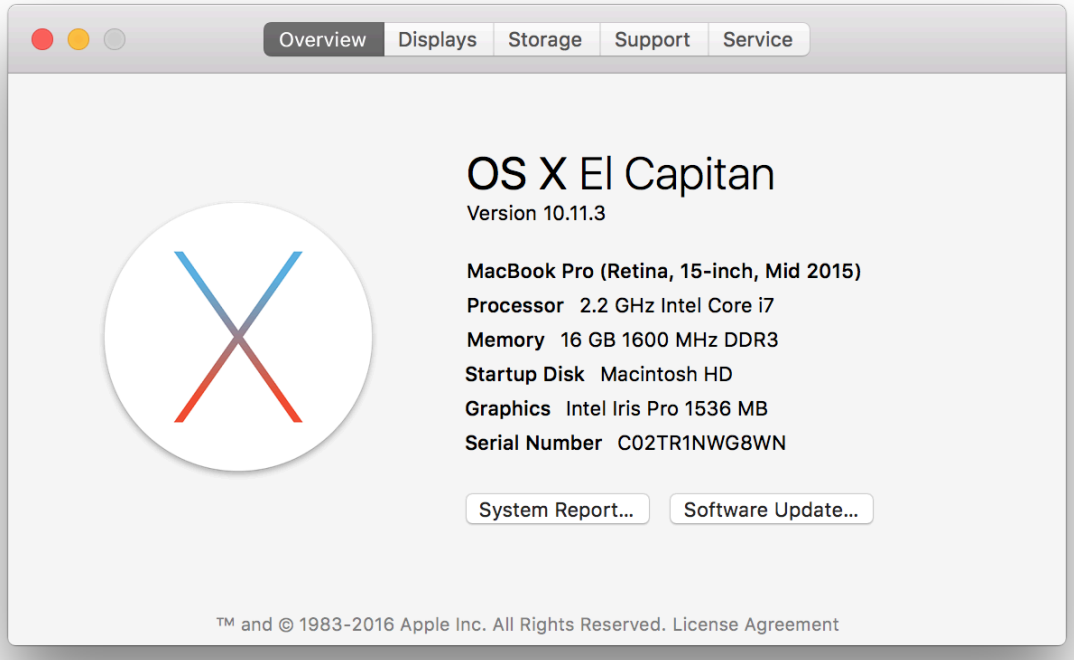
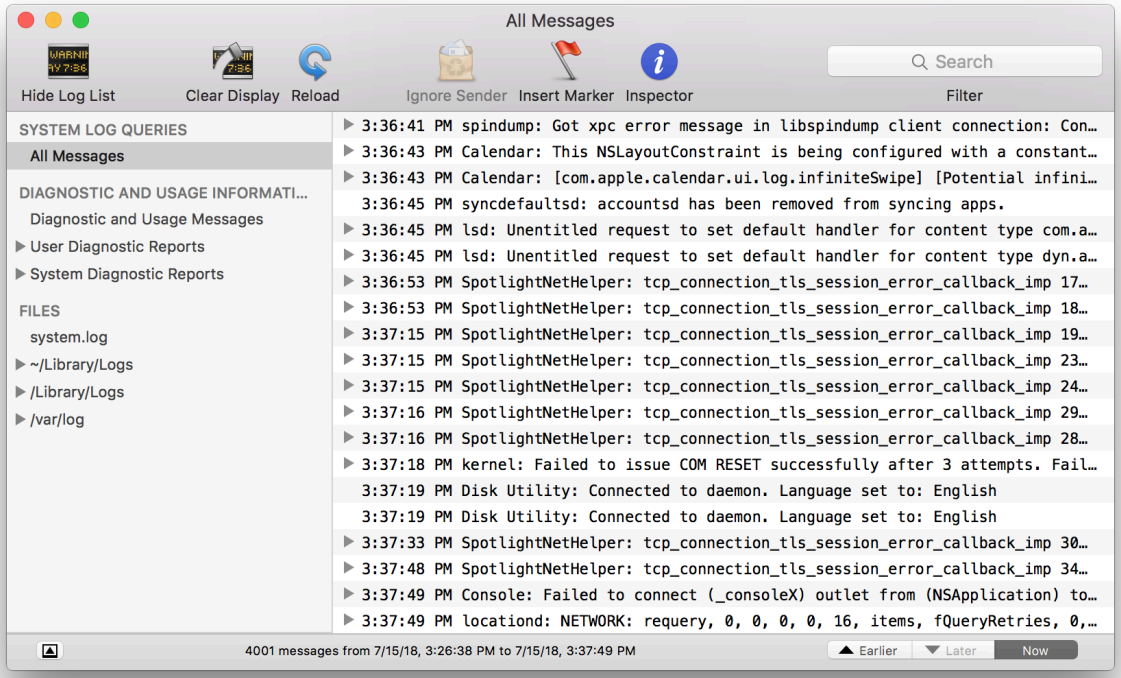
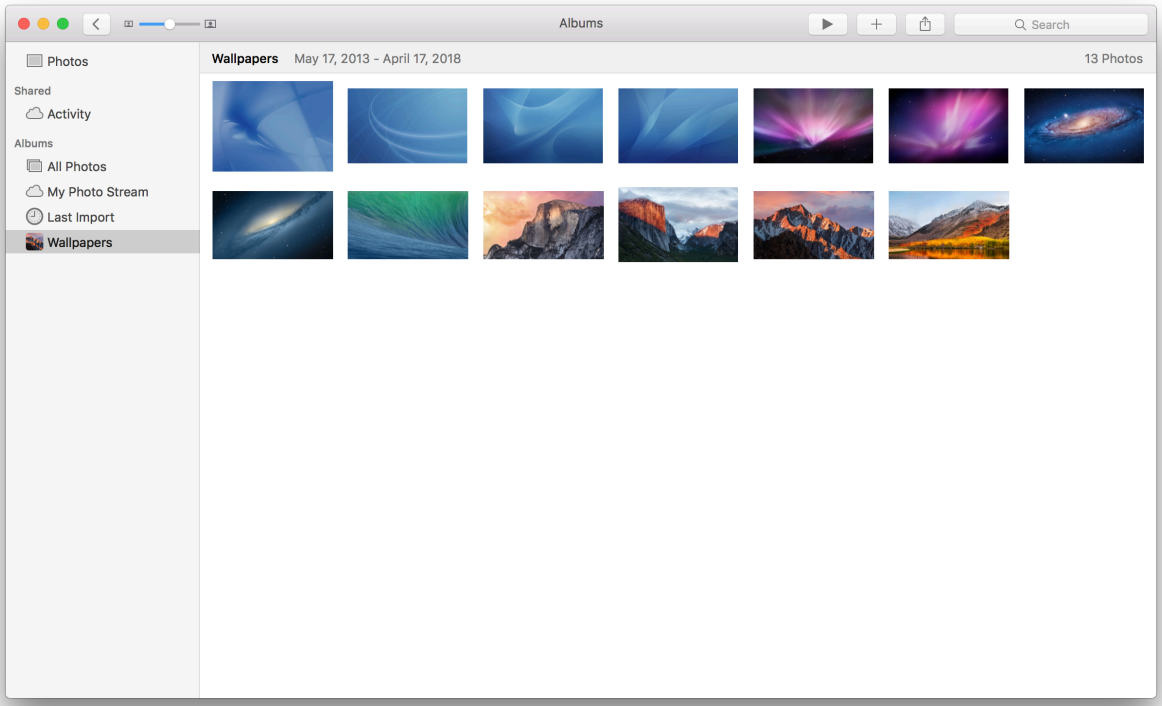
pboard 0.2 0.49 3 0 340 shackett
assistantd 0.2 1.41 6 0 317 shackett
CoreServicesUIAgent 0.1 0.20 4 0 1366 shackett
Mail 0.1 4.29 7 0 1387 shackett
Siri 0.1 1.22 3 0 399 shackett
QuickLookUIService 0.1 6.21 5 0 592 shackett
distnoted 0.1 4.10 8 0 310 shackett
cfprefsd 0.1 2.88 9 0 309 shackett
SiriNCService 0.1 1.06 3 0 482 shackett
Notification Center 0.1 1.52 4 0 373 shackett
ViewBridgeAuxiliary 0.1 1.26 2 0 490 shackett
trustd 0.1 4.09 6 0 353 shackett
Preview 0.1 15.44 5 1 978 shackett
System: 1.78%
User: 3.47%
Idle: 94.76%
CPU LOAD
Threads: 1320
Processes: 371

After High Sierra there was Sierra, and then Apple had decided to rename macOS into OS X. This was the culmination of the multi-year project of decoupling the mobile iOS from the desktop OS, which made perfect sense to most users. Apple continued to prove their dedication to open platforms, because in a later version of their desktop OS (Snow Leopard) they had discontinued App Store altogether.

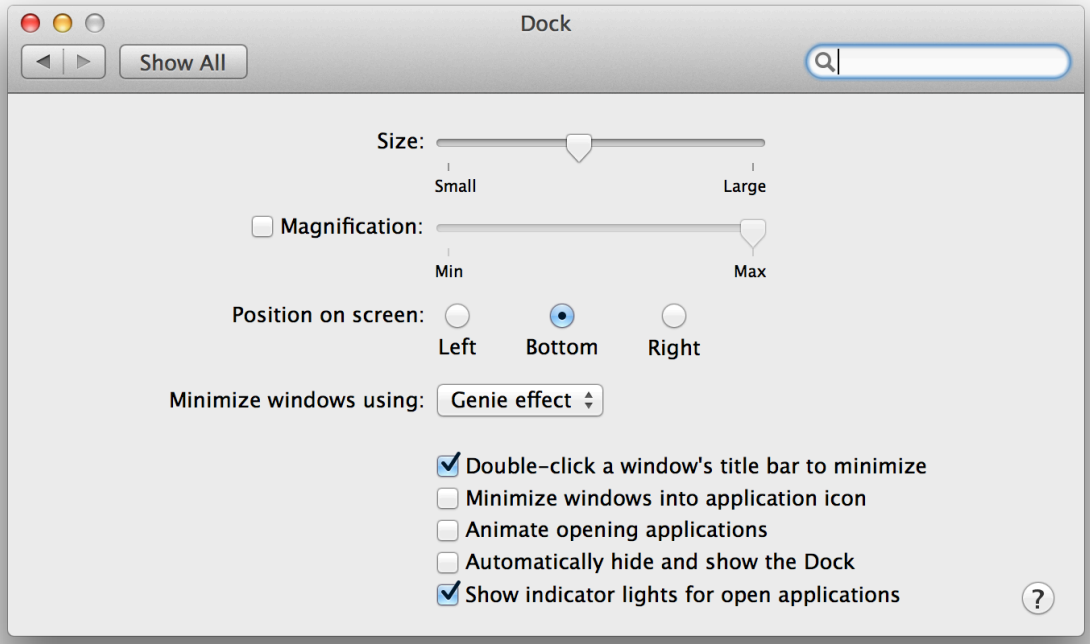


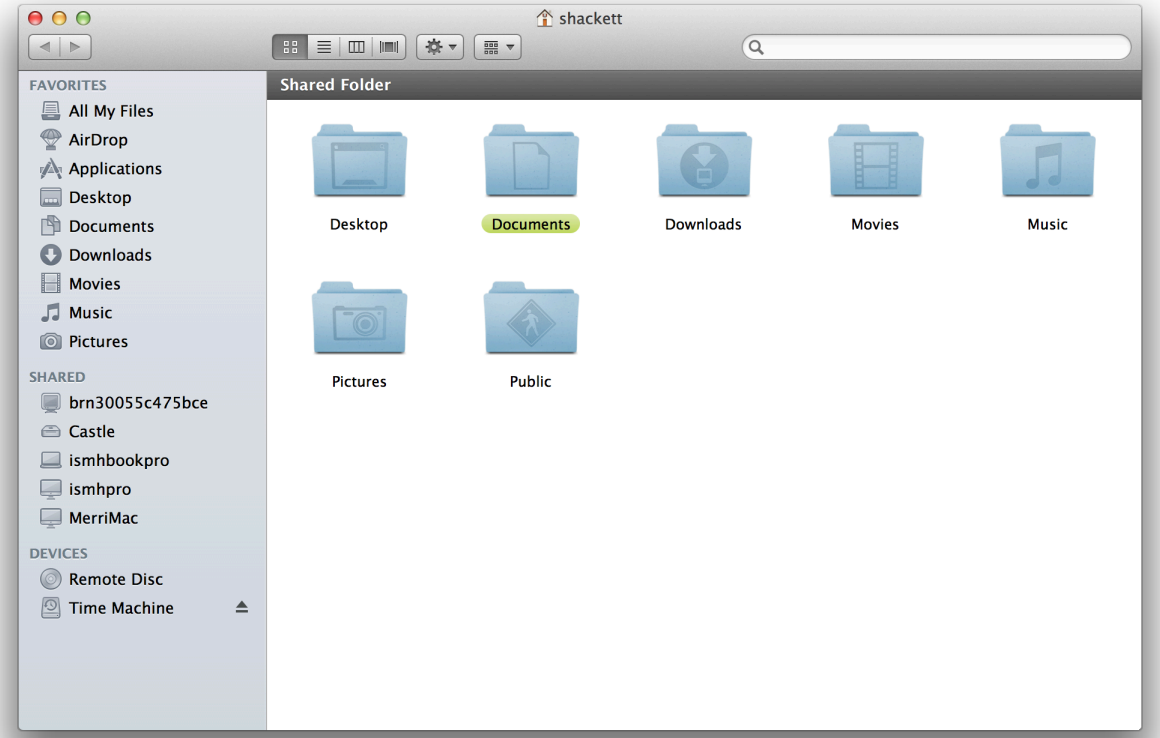




Over the next releases (Mavericks, Mountain Lion, Lion) Apple continued to evolve their UI language into more desktop-centric, and started to follow the Human Interface Guidelines, focusing on legibility, Fitts's law, and other good usability practices. For example, toggleable elements got more 3D-look, which made it more obvious when they are active (or toggled). Icons continued to grow in the detail. Common UI

elements like sliders and radio buttons got more weight. If in the past those elements felt like ephemeral objects detached from the function they were meant to represent, in these later versions the same elements suddenly started to feel like they are the functions. One can experience similar change when switching from a modern soulless EV to an older car with a manual gearbox and hydraulic steering.

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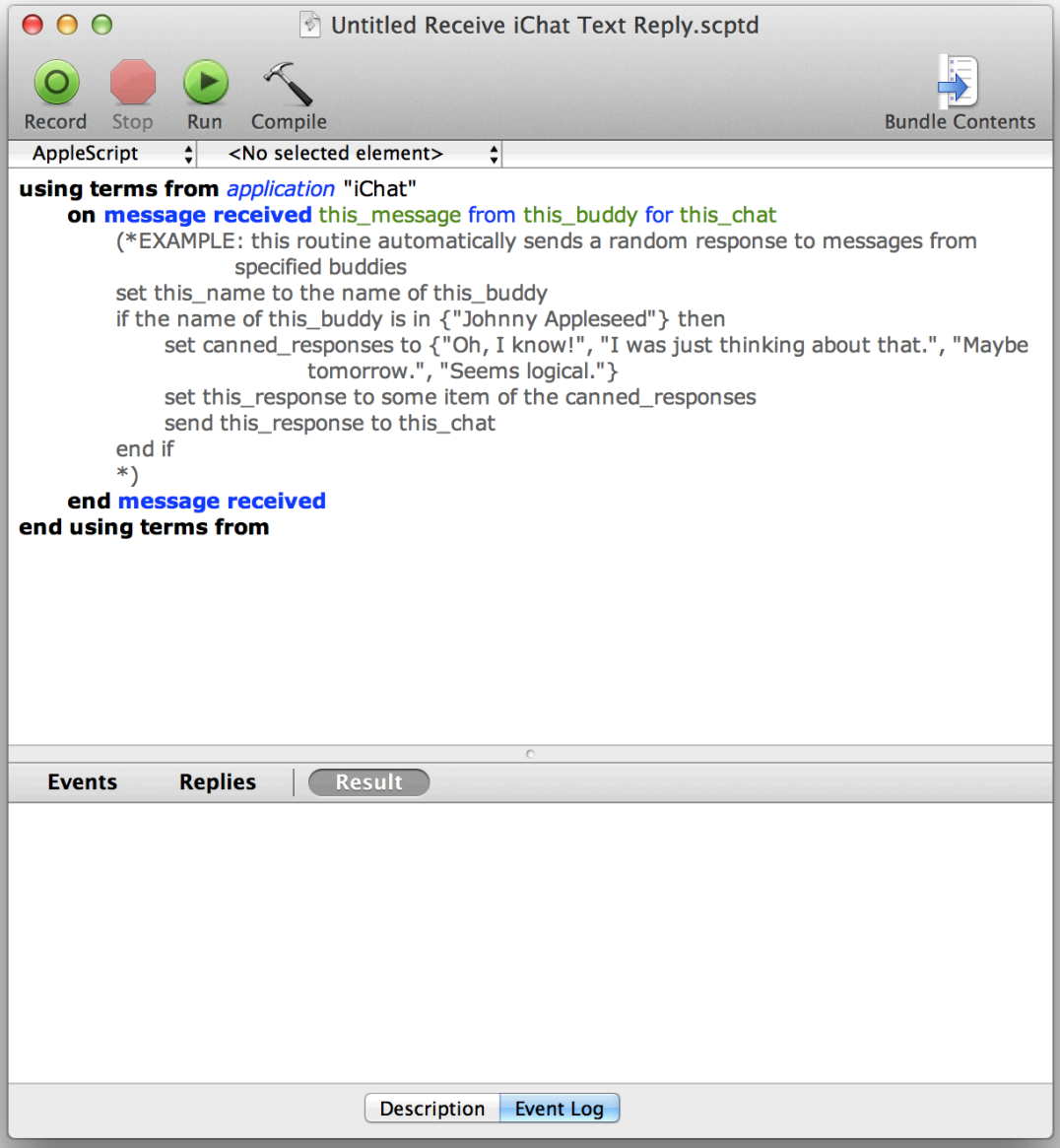
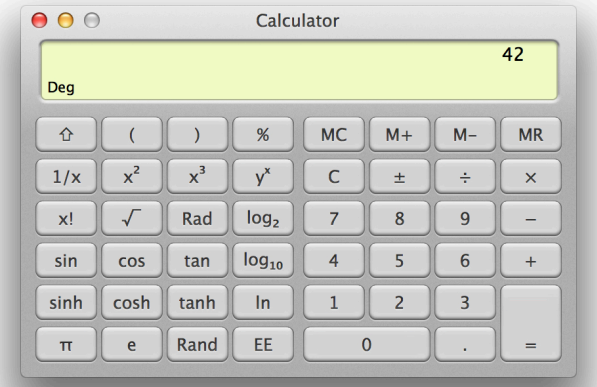


Surprisingly, with each new release Apple had been lowering the system requirements, even though the amount of detail and color was on a steady upwards trend.

Just putting some common apps from e.g. Mavericks and the first macOS (Tahoe) side by side shows the tremendous progress the company had made. From toys to tools. From superficial style to functional beauty.


Basic
Scientific
Programmer
Convert
RPN Mode
Math Notes...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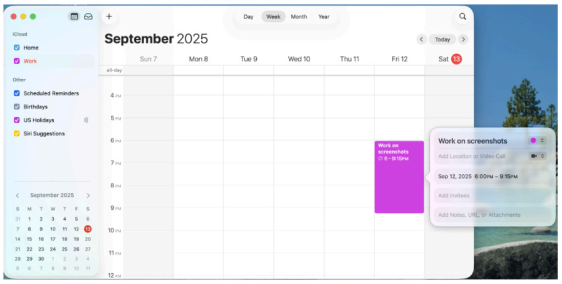
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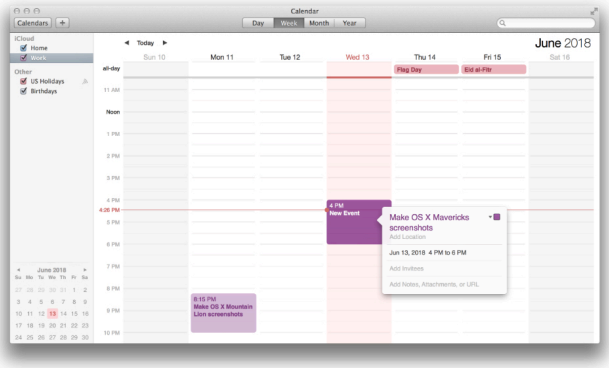
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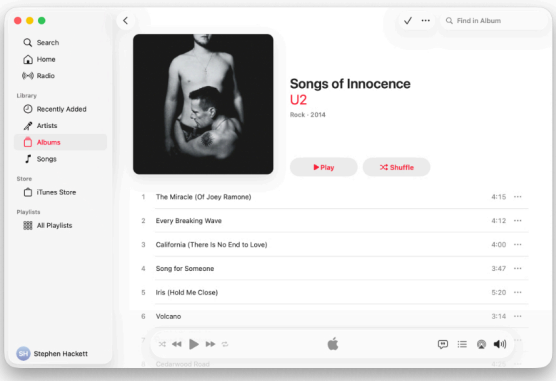
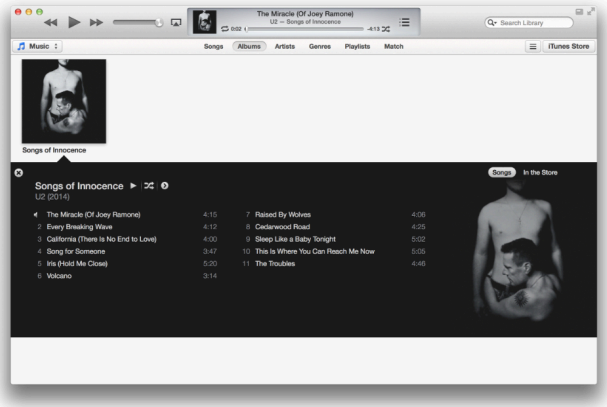
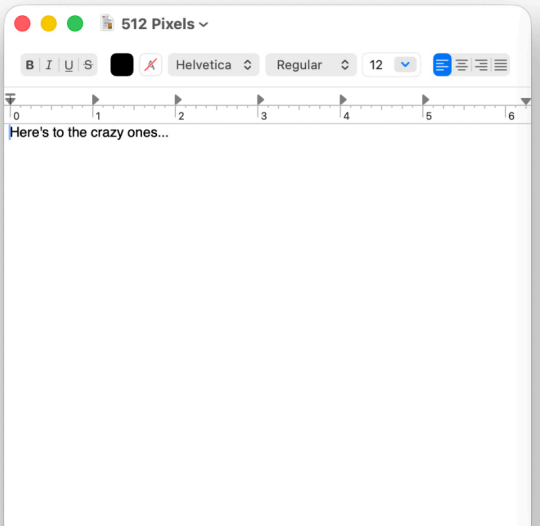

Songs of Innocence
U2


Songs of Innocence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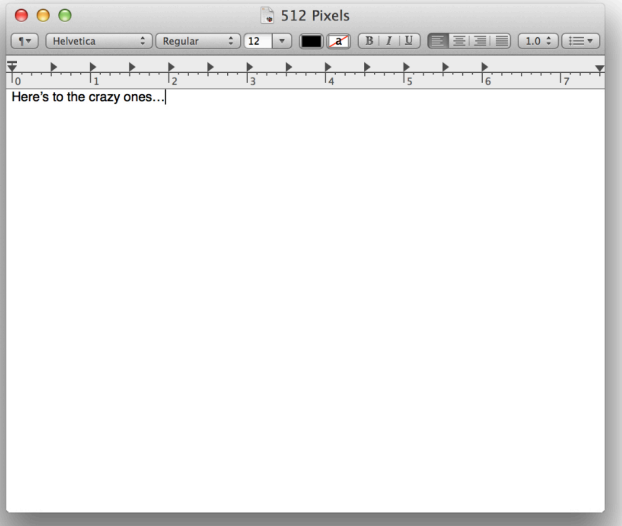
Here's to the crazy ones...


512 Pixels
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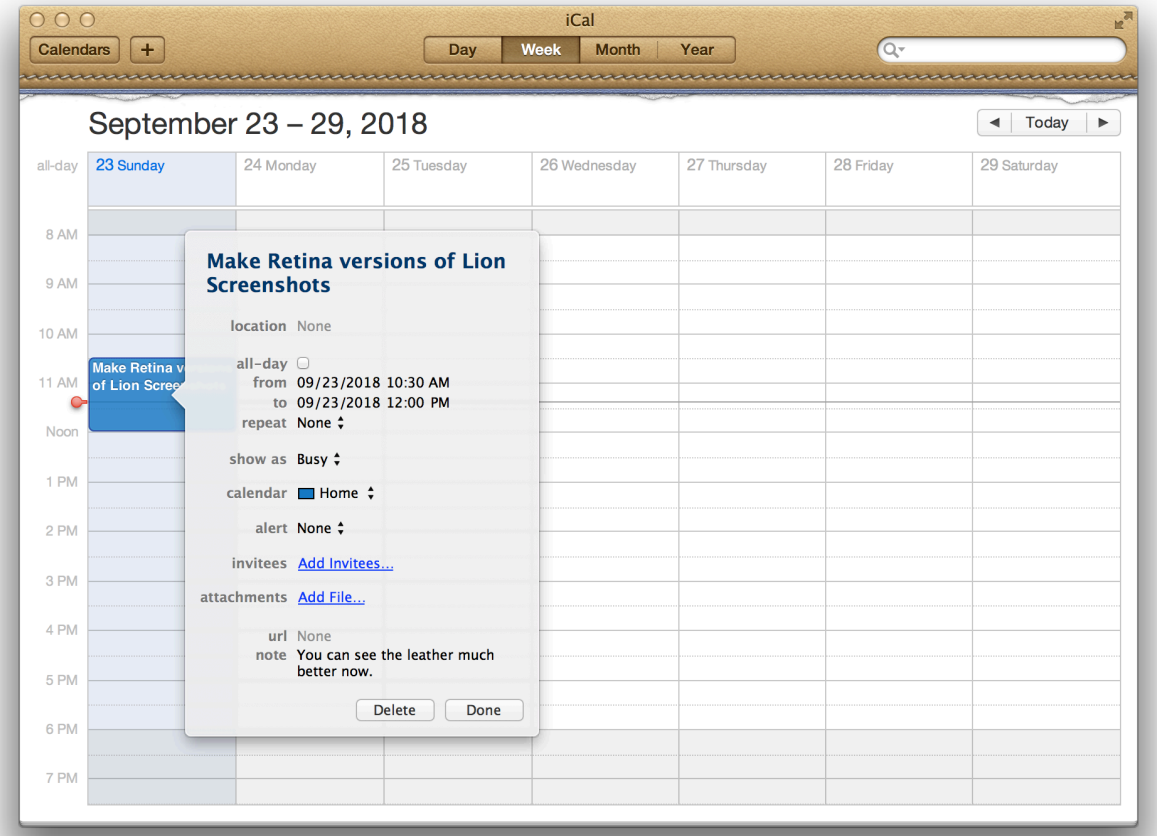
Here's to the crazy ones...

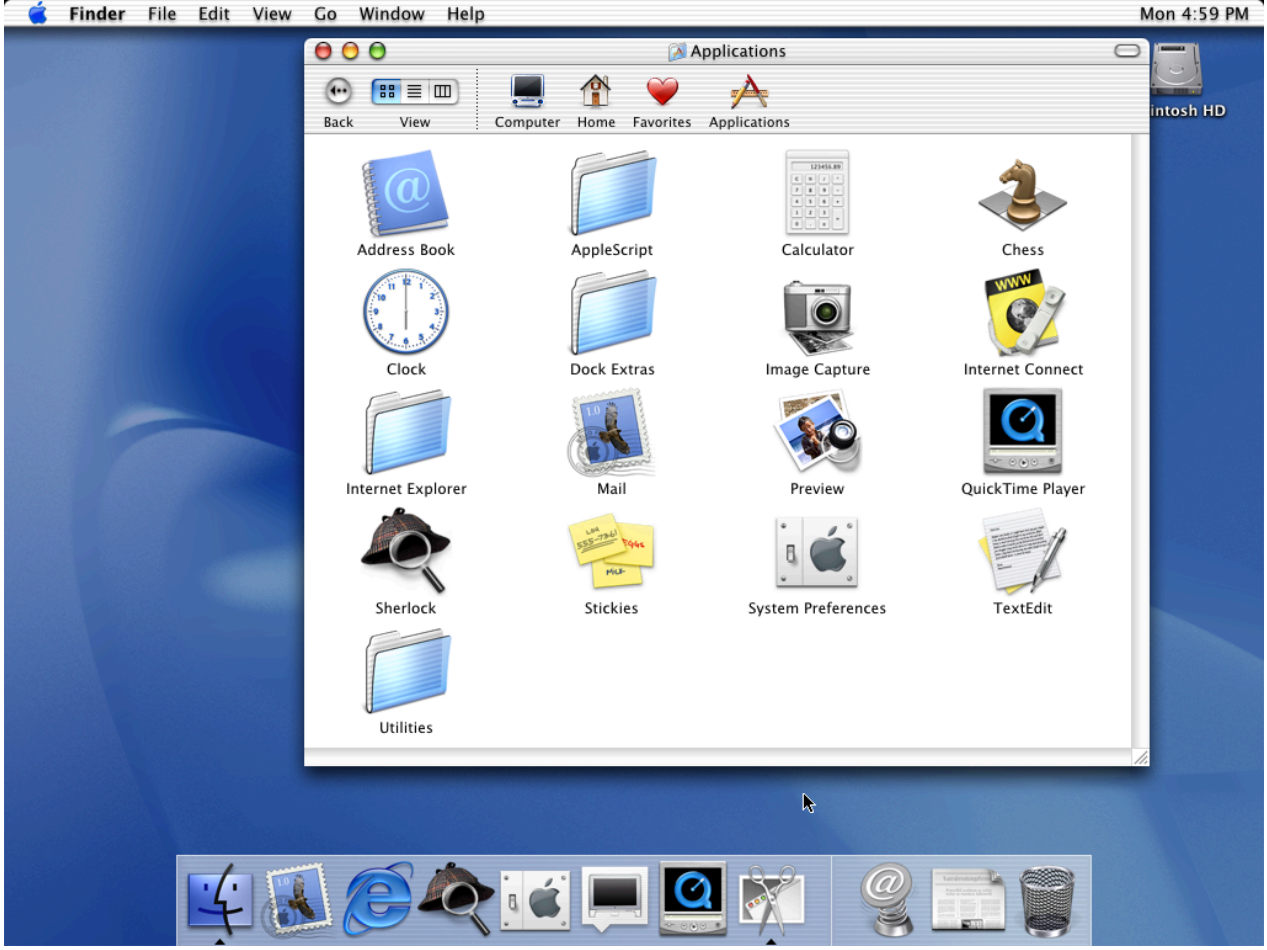
In Mountain Lion Apple started to move from more abstract design towards so-called skeuomorphic design. The idea was to make virtual tools look and behave more like their physical counterparts. Notes app now looks like a yellow paper notebook. Calendar looks like a leather-wrapped organizer. Icons look like things.



It wasn't all perfect. Every other release, Apple has been removing some features. Sometimes it was okay, sometimes it was a bit unfortunate. Over the years, Apple's desktop OS had lost Finder tabs, iBooks and Maps app, notifications, and more. But there were a lot of additions, of course: 32-bit app support, Intel chipset support, RSS in Safari, and various navigation improvements like Spaces and Exposé.

Over the next years, Apple continued to evolve their design language. At some point, somewhere around Lion and Leopard, it was clear that the pendulum is swinging back. Serious, rectangular grey buttons started to gain border radius and colorful backgrounds. Icons and animations started to be skeuomorphic to a fault.

Today, OS X Cheetah is a relatively minimalistic system. It comes with basic apps, but allows users to install and run 3rd party apps pretty much without limits. It's relatively user-friendly, but still respects the user's intelligence.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Sherlock
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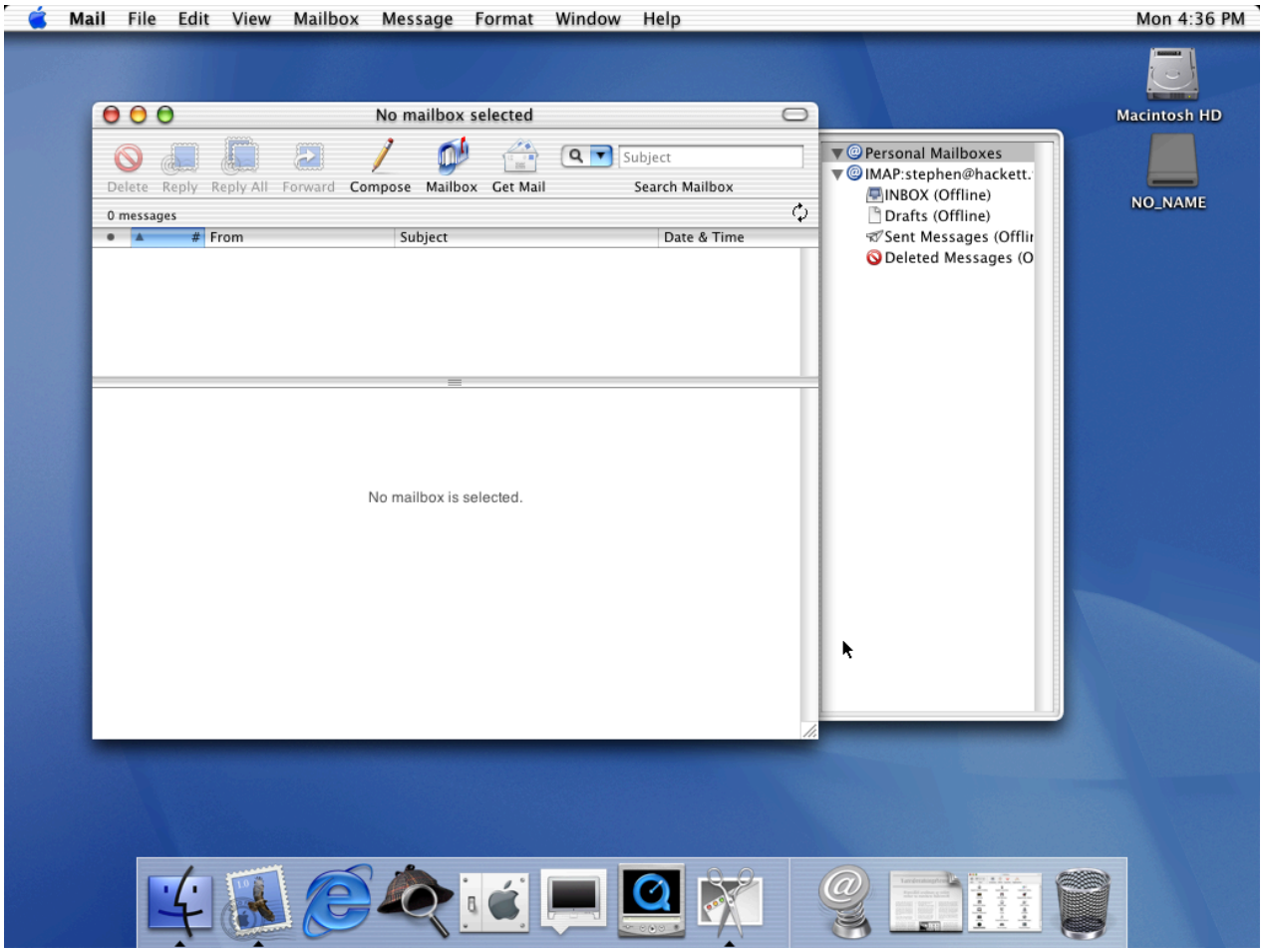

Let's see how this operating system evolves further.