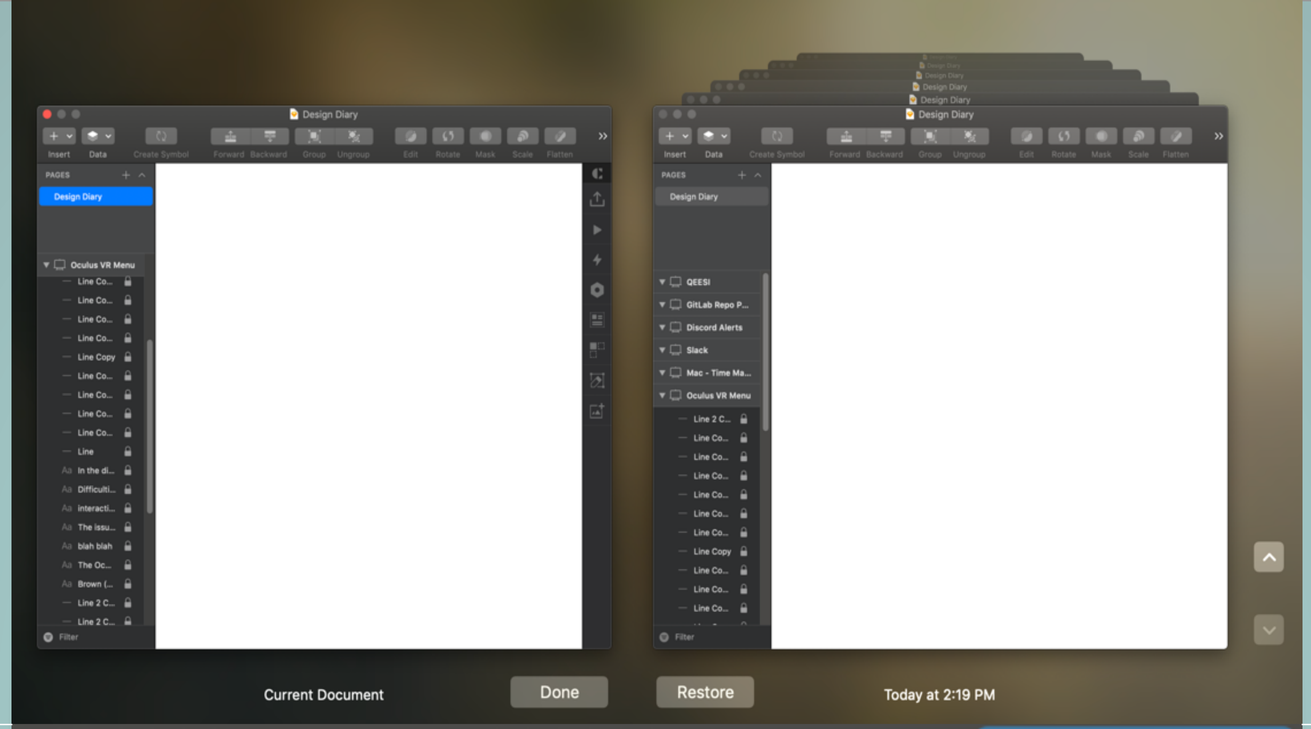
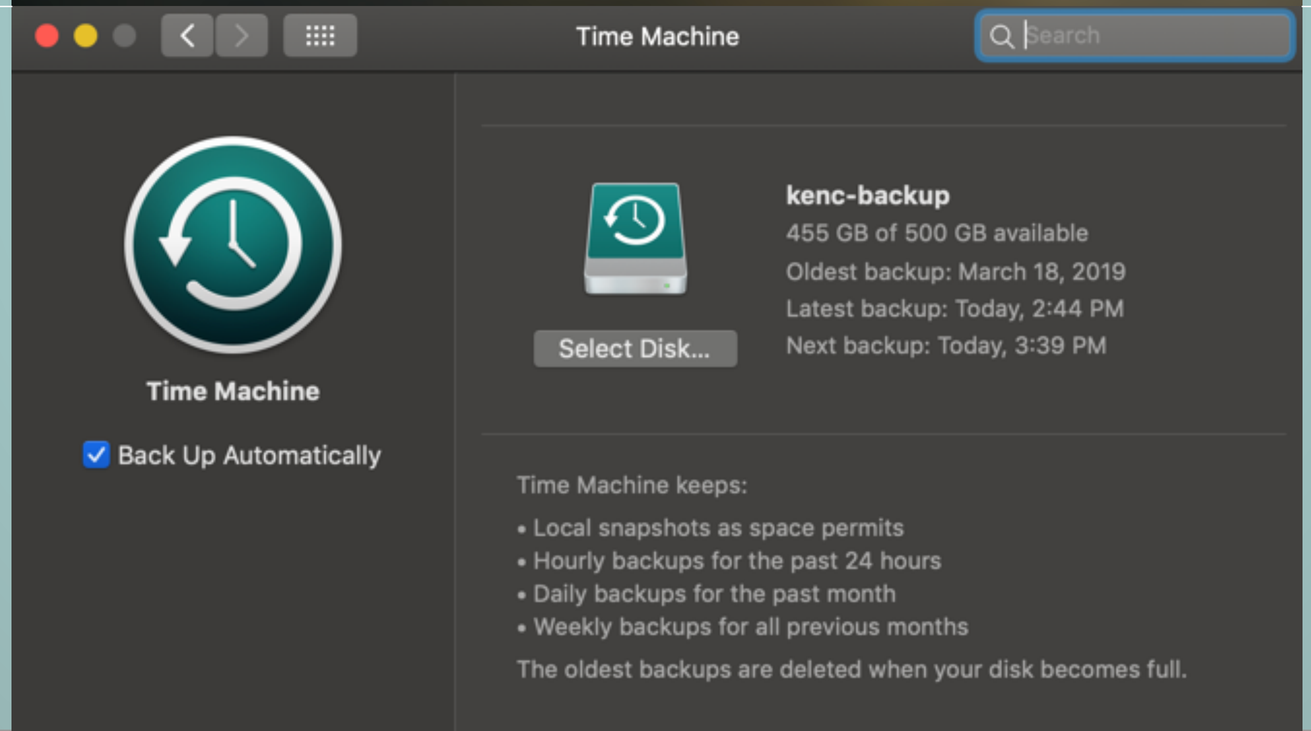
Context

Time Machine is a software the the Apple Mac line uses to provide backup options for users. The Time Machine Preferences (bottom image) is used to configure the backups. When Time Machine is opened, referred to as “Enter Time Machine” you are immediately prompted with the list of restore options for the program that is currently active (top image shows Sketch).





Framing

Mahatody, Sagar, and Kolski (2010) break down many of the varying cognitive walkthroughs that have been developed and one consistent underlying factor is the pursuit of understanding user goals and how they go about achieving them. Conducting any of the Heuristic Analysis or Cognitive Walkthrough’s mentioned would result in this scenario providing very little context as to how to properly utilize the Time Machine software. The learning process for the user is plagued with a cycle of trial and error with results that would vary from insignificant to detrimental in regards to the achievement of user goals.

Nature

The issue with this process flow is the general lack of context provided to the user. In most backup scenarios, a “wizard process” is provided to guide the user through the steps needed to restore a system or files. “Enter Time Machine” results in an immediate prompt to restore the most recently active program and provides the user with only “Done” and “Restore” options that seem to imply a change has been made regardless of their selection. Considering that in recent studies fewer than 50% of user backup their data, this process is sure to confuse the average user (Budman, 2011).

Recommendations

There are quite a few possibilities for improvement on this design. While it is understandable that the Apple team is striving for simplicity and efficiency with this design, a simple and repeatable walkthrough of the system functions would produce not only a sense of success in new users but also an opportunity to increase the number of users utilizing a backup system. Providing simple and repeatable instruction would reduce the cognitive distance required to bridge the gap between the design and the user’s conceptual model.