



# The fun starts here!

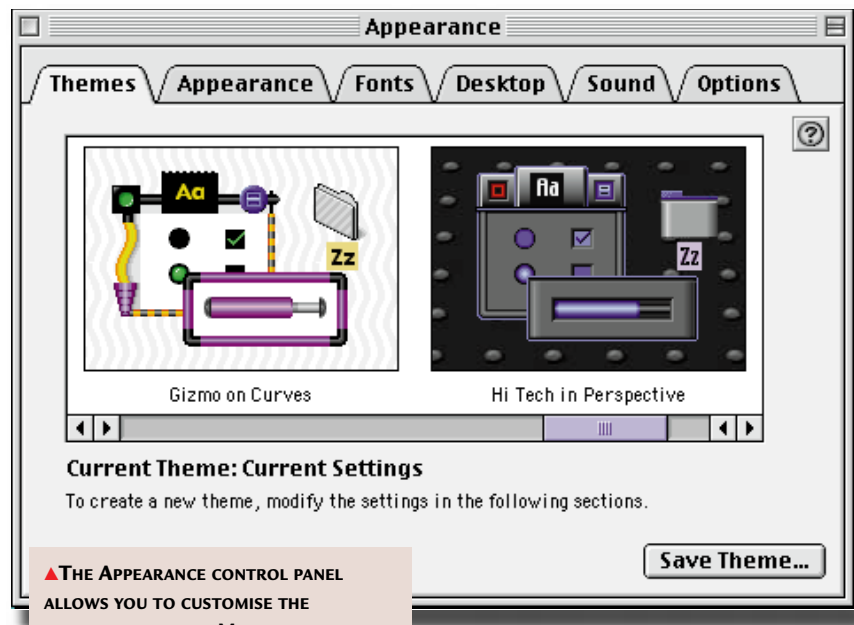
**Fast, flexible and innovative — and a cool black desktop is just for starters: Apple's great white hope is the exciting MacOS 8.5. Cliff Joseph brings you his first impressions of the beta release.**

It seems like there's just no stopping the new Apple. September saw the release of the iMac, the most exciting new product to come out of Apple for years, and October brings us MacOS 8.5 — also known as Allegro, within Apple. Many PC users have been asking whether it's worth upgrading to Windows 98, but there are no such doubts about MacOS 8.5. The Mac OS is currently at version 8.1, so the move from 8.1 to 8.5 may not seem like much of a change. But OS 8.5 really does have a lot of very worthwhile new features in it.

## Loose ends

The first thing it does is to tidy up a few loose ends left over from pre-PowerPC days. The MacOS still contains a few bits of old code written for Motorola's original 68000 series of processors, despite the fact that Apple switched to PowerPC processors several years ago. MacOS 8.5 has replaced some of this old code with **native PowerPC code** that should run a lot faster. QuickDraw, the software that handles the Mac's screen display, is now entirely native so screen redrawing should be much snappier. The AppleScript scripting system is also native now, so scripts should run much more quickly. This will please the publishing people who use AppleScript to automate their workflow routines, as will the improved performance when copying files across a network.

These under-the-bonnet changes are welcome, but the **great strength of the Mac** has always been its interface, and there are plenty of changes to the Mac interface in OS 8.5. The biggest new feature here is the Appearances control panel. This enables you to create "themes" for the appearance of your Mac's desktop. And as well as choosing



▲ THE APPEARANCE CONTROL PANEL ALLOWS YOU TO CUSTOMISE THE APPEARANCE OF THE MAC DESKTOP USING THEMES SUCH AS GIZMO AND HI-TECH

different fonts and background pictures, themes also allow you to alter the appearance of items such as title bars and scrollbars. The beta release we tested contained two themes called **Gizmo** and **Hi-tech**. Gizmo is a brightly-coloured theme that will probably appeal to kids, while Hi-tech applies a cool, black look to the Mac desktop. Once you've selected the basic theme, you can then alter individual settings such as the colour used to highlight objects or whether or not to have collapsible

## *The Mac is still capable of coming up with some innovative surprises*

windows. And you can add "soundtracks", which link new sound effects to actions such as opening windows or moving items around the desktop.

When you've got the desktop looking and sounding the way you want it, you can save your changes as a custom theme of your own. Themes are stored in their own folder in the main System Folder so it's easy to add new themes, and people will soon probably start to exchange home-made themes on the internet. The

changes you make here affect the way your desktop looks, but there are other improvements in OS 8.5 that affect how the desktop works. Thankfully, you can now resize and re-order the columns of information that appear when you view the contents of a window in List view. If you want to see the size of a file before any other piece of information, you just click on the header of the "Size" column and drag it to the required position. You can also use the Preferences dialog to set global viewing options for all windows, rather than having to set each window's options separately. **Scrollbars work**

**differently now**, providing "live" scrolling so that the contents of windows scroll as you drag the scrollbar. The scrollbar also has a "proportional" option now. This is similar to the way that scrollbars work in Windows, with the size of the scrollbar varying to indicate the proportion of the window you are currently viewing.

## In the dock

When you open more than one application, the names of those applications still appear as a pull-down list in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. However, you can now tear off this list so that it remains on-screen as a

small floating palette called the Applications Dock. You can switch from one application to another by clicking the application's name in the dock. This is a useful new feature, but it would be even better if you could switch between applications using the keyboard, as you can in Windows.

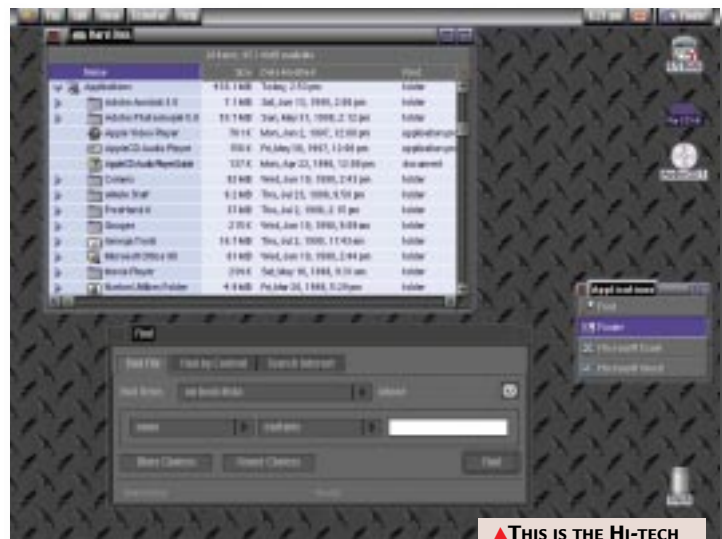
## Favourite things

There's one new feature that you may not be able to use straight away. Apple has finally gotten around to redesigning the standard **Open and Save dialog boxes**. These now allow you to select multiple documents, as well as storing a list of your most recently-used files. There's a new option called "favourites", which allows you to create a pull-down list of your most frequently-used folders. This allows you to quickly place documents within these folders without having to navigate through the contents of your hard disk to find them. The only problem here is that applications need to be upgraded before they can make full use of the new Open and Save features. Fortunately, the changes needed are quite small, so hopefully developers will be able to post updates on the internet soon after the release of OS 8.5. The fact that some of these new features are already standard items in Windows 95 and 98 is a sad testimony to the neglect that the Mac OS suffered under some of Apple's previous managements. However, the

Mac is still capable of coming up with some innovative surprises of its own. Perhaps the single **most important improvement** in OS 8.5 is the new Find command. The Find dialog box now contains three tabbed pages that allow you to perform different types of searches. The standard Find File option is still there, allowing you to quickly locate files on specific hard disks by searching for attributes such as their name, date or size. However, you can now use an intelligent search engine that Apple calls "Sherlock" to locate files by providing details of their content. If I want to locate documents that contain references to the new iMac, I

***OS 8.5 provides some real fun ... more than you can say about Windows 98***

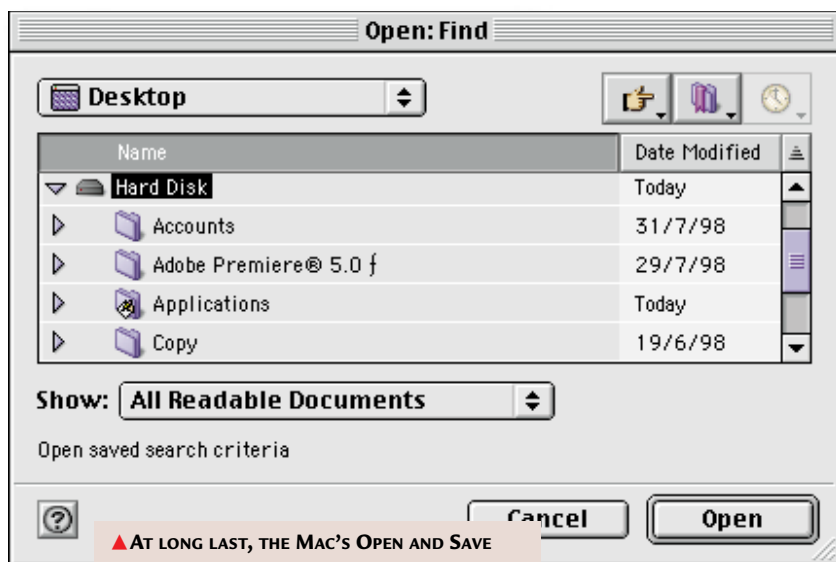
just type "iMac" into the dialog box and Sherlock will locate all the relevant documents on my hard disk and even sort them into order of relevance. Best of



▲ **THIS IS THE HI-TECH THEME. IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, YOU CAN MIX AND MATCH THEME ELEMENTS TO CREATE YOUR OWN PERSONAL THEME**

all, though, is the new **Internet Search option**. Just type in the information you're looking for, and Sherlock will connect to the internet and search using whatever search engine you specify. It then compiles a list of web pages that are relevant, and when you click any page in this list it will display a summary of the content of that page in a panel below the main list. The beta version of OS 8.5 that we tested had a few problems when it came to narrowing the scope of internet searches, but hopefully these problems will have been ironed out in the final shipping version. There are quite a few features that we haven't even touched on — such as the new AppleScript tools — but we'll take a closer look at specific features in future editions of this column.

**OS 8.5 may only be** a stepping stone on the way to OS X — the real biggie that is due this time next year — but it's definitely worth buying. It provides powerful new features, improved performance and — in the Appearance control panel — some real fun. And that's a lot more than you can say about Windows 98.



▲ **AT LONG LAST, THE MAC'S OPEN AND SAVE DIALOG BOXES HAVE BEEN UPDATED. HOWEVER, APPLICATIONS NEED TO BE UPGRADED TO MAKE USE OF THEIR NEW FEATURES**

## PCW CONTACTS

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