Sonic boon

Tim Nott hears of a new file player to put good sounds on your PC. Plus, audio standards.

One of the bits of unofficial showing-off by the Windows 95 interface team was the clock which came with Powertoys. Nothing really remarkable about it except that it was round — a porthole, if you like, rather than a rectangular window. There's no reason why windows should be rectangular, either in operating systems or architecture, so when I was digging through the Litestep site for last month's *Hands On* I was rather impressed by a strangely-shaped thing in some of the screenshots. What, I asked one of the creators, is that? It turned out to be a music player called Sonique.

Sonique has a variety of interesting shapes ranging from a tiny little roller that unfolds to display controls when the mouse pointer passes over it, to a fully-fledged console with a drop-down graphic equaliser.

My personal favourite is the rather organic shape shown in Fig 1. If Kai Krause, the doyen of digital imaging, and designer Philippe Starck teamed up to conceive a personal stereo, then it would probably look something like this.

Although it will play individual tracks from audio CDs it's essentially a file player and will work with a variety of formats including MPG123, MP2, MP3, MOD, XM, IT, PLS and S3M as well as the more mundane WAV. As well as playing music you have loads of knobs to twiddle and besides the graphic equaliser mentioned earlier you can change the pitch, juggle playlists and engage in all sorts of arcane activities, with options. There's also a variety of visual effects you can have pulsating away to the music. At the time of writing there is no help file so it's very much a case of playing around to see what happens. Also, Sonique was still in beta and the expiry date meant I couldn't include it on our cover-mounted CD-ROM. You can, however, download a free trial version from www. sonique.com.

Having got the player, it made sense to get something to play on it — it's surprising how quickly one can get bored with TADA.WAV and the Microsoft Sound.WAV. If these file extensions don't mean much to you, well, they don't to me either, except for MP3.

MP3 audio compression standard provides good quality music in around a tenth of the storage space of conventional CD-Audio. As such, running at around a megabyte a minute, transferring music across a modem link becomes a viable possibility. Although it takes a lot longer to download than a 'streamed' format like Real Audio, the difference in quality is astounding: it's like comparing Bang and Olufsen with a wind-up Victrola gramophone.

There is a huge number of MP3 tracks available free, as well as a number of pay sites and although the Sonique site has plenty of links, www.mp3.com is probably as good a place to start as any. Here you will find well-known artistes as well as lesser-known bands. Among the latter I found God Ate My Homework, not so much a garage as a bicycle shed

◄ Fig 1 Sonique — the free-form music player

You can engage in all sorts of arcane activities, with options

band, whose seminal work 'Secret Asian Man' contains the immortal lines:
'He is playing Mahjong
As he downloads from Hong Kong,
Where today it's already tomorrow'.

But surely, you ask, what is to stop unscrupulous types from pirating copyright material? Well, just as there is pirated software, pornography, racist propaganda and terrorist manuals available on the web, so there is also bootleg music and unless you live an extraordinarily sheltered life you'll realise that you can get all these things on traditional magnetic, optical or paper media anyway. However, it is not compulsory to download stolen music but I dare say it makes good copy for the more webophobic among the press.

Sites such as www.mp3.com are, in fact, extremely conscientious about

copyright and all the music you find there will have the copyright holder's consent. I think it's a brilliant way for bands and individual musicians to bring their work to the attention of a larger audience. (See also, *News Analysis* p38).

☞ A good view

Call me old-fashioned but I really don't feel the need to view my folders as web pages. But just as I was congratulating myself on answering Jeremy Castle's query (p228) about disabling the warning before Windows 98 will let you see the contents of the Windows folder, along came Ian Briscoe with another method.

This lets you retain 'View as web page' whilst seeing the files without the irritating preamble. The answer resides in a file called FOLDER.HTT. This, as Ian points out, is 'basically a JavaScript program with HTML wrapper' [Fig 2]. I will be honest — mainly because I realise I

haven't a hope of bluffing my way through this — and admit that my knowledge of HTML is on a par with Posh Spice's grasp of Mesopotamian Cuneiform. My JavaScript expertise is even less. Nevertheless, I've tried Ian's instructions and they work (see the panel *Revealing files in web view,* below).

• **Next month,** we'll be rolling our own Java applets with an empty washing-up liquid bottle and the cardboard centre from a kitchen roll. Meanwhile, I think Ian has earnt himself a book token for such a fine piece of meddling.

REVEALING FILES IN WEB VIEW

First, make a backup of the FOLDER.HTT in the Windows folder, preferably with a different extension. Then open FOLDER.HTT in Notepad. Fight back the rising tide of panic, and look for the line:

```
var showFiles = false;
Change this to read:
var showFiles = true;
```

• **Next,** look for the Init function, which goes:

```
function Init() {
document.all.FileList.style.display = "none";
document.all.Brand.style.display = "";
// call our FixSize() function whenever the window gets resized
  window.onresize = FixSize;
  FixSize();
Info.innerHTML = L_Intro_Text + "<br><br>" + L_Prompt1_Text;
}
```

• **Change** the second and third lines to read:

```
    document.all.FileList.style.display = "";
    document.all.Brand.style.display = "none";
```

• **Change** the last line to read:

```
Info.innerHTML = L_Intro_Text + "<br><br>" +✔
L_Prompt_Text;
```

(Key: ✔ *code line continues)*

• **As an alternative** to this last step you could modify

```
var L_Prompt1_Text =
```

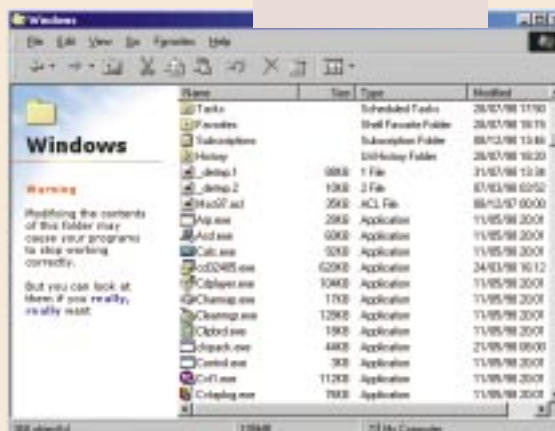which you'll find back up near the start of the file, to anything you feel might be more suitable.

• **Save** FOLDER.HTT over the original and the job is done.

The Windows folder will then show all its files when opened in web view. You'll get the warning but not the 'Click here...' and the former will disappear as soon as you select a file, when you'll get the usual details and preview. There, that wasn't too bad, was it?

Questions & answers

Q I've just added a second hard disk and relocated the 'My Documents' folder on it. I then redirected the 'Send to...' command but instead of moving the highlighted files to the new 'My Documents' it copies them, leaving the originals behind. Although the 'Send to any folder...' Power Toy tool works it always prompts for a destination. Any ideas?
MALCOLM CHERRIE

a *Yes. If you hold down the Shift key when you use 'Send To...' the files will be moved (shifted, geddit?) rather than copied.*

Q Some time ago you gave details of a program that would reveal the 'real' password you see as a row of asterisks in, for example, the DialUp Networking login. I have looked through back issues of your magazine on CD-ROM (honest!) with a variety of keywords including 'password' and 'asterisk' but have failed to find it.
NEVILLE FAIRBAIRN

a *That's probably because it was in the December '97 column which cycled off the CD in the January '98 issue. Anyway, the program you want is Revelation 1.1 which is available free from www.snadboy.com.*

Q How can I stop the annoying warning that 'Modifying the contents of this folder may cause your programs to stop working correctly' when I open, say, the Windows folder? Is there a way of by-passing the clicking on 'Show files'?
JEREMY CASTLE

a *The easy way, having once shown the files, is to uncheck 'View as Web page' from the View menu. Then make sure that 'Remember each folder's view settings' is ticked in Explorer's View, Folder Options, View. You'll lose the little preview as well as the details area to the left of the file list but you can usually get those from right-clicking*

QuickView or Properties. For a far more complicated way of doing it, see Ian Briscoe's contribution on page 227.

Q Can I get rid of the 'Favorites' entry on the Start Button in Windows 98?
MIKE DURIE

a *Yes. The Windows 98 version of TweakUI will let you do this. You can also get rid of the 'Documents' and 'Log*

off...' entries at the same time. They are all in the IE4 tab *[Fig 3]*.

Q I have recently upgraded to Windows 98 and I like the new Quicklaunch toolbar but it has a tendency to swap its icons around so, for example, the button with the Notepad icon actually launches Paint. It can get very confusing. Is there a way of taming this?
COLIN DECKER

a *This is a common complaint. I do not know why it happens but you can restore the icons by right-clicking on an empty part of the toolbar and then choosing 'Refresh'.*

Q I seem to remember that you printed a tip a while ago on how to get another instance of Explorer running just after it crashes — i.e. all the system tray icons disappear. Could you refresh my memory?
PETER GEDDES

a *I certainly can — you just press Control + Alt + Del. Then Select Explorer — not Exploring — from the list and click 'End Task'. The Windows Shut Down confirmation will then appear. Cancel it. Wait. In due course, a 'Not Responding' dialogue will appear. Click the 'End Task' button. The Taskbar and Desktop icons will momentarily disappear then reload. You will not get the tray icons back, however, without restarting Windows normally.*

Q How can I persuade Internet Explorer just to download Zip files rather than attempt to open them?
ALAN BUNTING

a *From Windows (rather than Internet) Explorer, go to Options (a.k.a. Folder Options) on the View menu and select the File Types tab. Select the WinZip file type, hit the Edit button, then tick the 'Confirm open after download' checkbox.*

Q I made a custom launch bar, similar to the Windows 98 Quicklaunch bar, in the Taskbar. It has now sunk without trace. Is it possible to get it back or do I have to start from scratch?
DELPHINE MOREAU

a *A custom toolbar is just another way of looking at a folder. When you create a new toolbar you are asked to browse to an existing folder. As long as you haven't deleted the folder you can get the toolbar back by right-clicking on a bare bit of Taskbar, selecting Toolbars, New Toolbar and browsing to the folder. The bad news is that when you close a toolbar either from its own controls (where you get asked to confirm) or from the Toolbar list (where you don't) this removes it from the list permanently — unlike the Quicklaunch, Address, and other built-in bars — so you have to go through the ritual above to re-open it. Worse, any custom settings you made such as ordering the icons or hiding the text will be lost.*
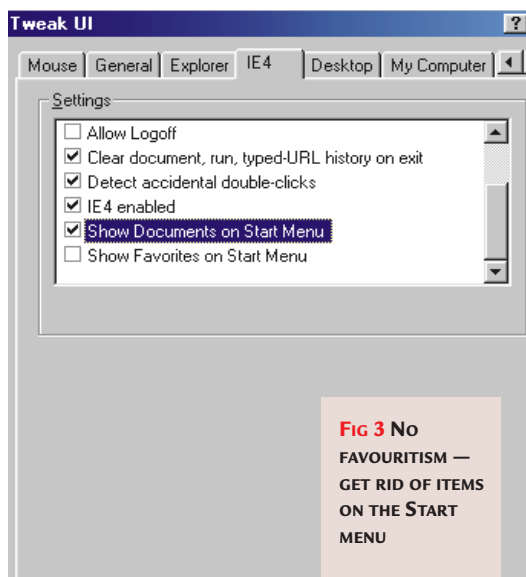

FIG 3 NO FAVOURITISM — GET RID OF ITEMS ON THE START MENU

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