



## Getting Started on the Mac: Software

by Craig Savage

In my last column, I laid out the specs for Macintosh hardware. Software is next. I come from the training-wheels school of learning. I think you should crawl before you walk and walk before you run. With that in mind, I suggest that first-time computer users buy *Microsoft Works* or *Claris Works*. Both have a word processor, spreadsheet, database, telecommunication program, and rudimentary drawing program all in one application for less than \$200. These programs are a sort of Shopsmith in software. Like the famous all-in-one woodworking tool, they attempt, successfully in most cases, to provide all the major software tasks in one program. Not only is this cheap, but it is the perfect set of training wheels for the newcomer.

Here's how it works. I am writing this article using the *Microsoft Works* word processor, and I'll check the spelling with the built-in spellchecker. I created the table

Function	Software	Retail Cost*
Integrated	Microsoft Works	\$185
	Claris Works	\$199
Accounting	Quicken	\$37
	ACCPAC	\$138
CAD	Superpaint	\$134
	Canvas	\$188
	MacDraw II	\$284
	Claris CAD	\$644

\*Prices may vary.

(below) with the spreadsheet and transferred it to this article. I use the database as a kind of electronic rolodex. It sits idle in the background, waiting for me to search for a telephone number or address. And the telecommunication module will let me send this article to JLC via my modem, where it will be deposited in their computer, ready for editing into the form you are reading now.

Let's pretend that you have taken the Works training wheels course — you could do it in a week of nights if you get involved — and you're ready to buy some dedicated programs to get your business going. If you currently run your business out of a checkbook (more contractors do than you think), I recommend *Quicken*, an elegant electronic checkbook that can even do rudimentary job costing.

If you are currently doing your books more along the lines of "gen-

erally accepted accounting principles," then I recommend a simple accounting package called ACCPAC. ACCPAC integrates six functions: general ledger, accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, inventory, and job cost. ACCPAC will teach you what a chart of accounts is and even includes a "Universal Construction Company" chart of accounts already set up. The program does everything you need except estimating, and that is no problem because you can do it in the spreadsheet (see "State-of-the-Art Contractor," 4/91). You might not use the inventory function, and the program won't compare your estimate to job cost, but you can do that task by hand and still save plenty of time. Your financial statements will be as current as U.S. Home's, and your bookkeeper will be able to find out how much you owe to a subcontractor. More importantly, with the click of the mouse button, you can instantly find out

how much is owed to you. It's easy, elegant, and cheap. And if later you decide to move up to dedicated construction software, your data and chart of accounts will transfer easily to the next package you choose.

Those of you who do design/build might find the CAD potential of the Mac interesting. If money is tight, start with a combination paint/draw program like *Superpaint* or *Canvas*. Both are easy to use and have scaling capabilities. They might be all you'll need for simple shop drawings and illustrations. If you need more sophisticated mechanical drawing features, and money is still a consideration, move up to *Mac Draw II*. Those of you who make a substantial portion of your living in design work should buy *Claris CAD*.

Finally, when considering the purchase of a computer, don't hesitate because computing is new to you. Buying a computer is just like buying any new tool. Sure, there will be a better cordless screwdriver on the market if you wait six months, but it's silly not to have today's model working for you now. ■

Craig Savage, a longtime builder and Macintosh user, owns Savage Co., in Palm Desert, Calif., and publishes the Macintosh Construction Forum, P.O. Box 1272, Sandpoint, ID 83864. He alternates this column with Morris Carey, who writes on IBM-compatible systems.

If you have a question about computing in construction, address it to State-of-the-Art Contractor, JLC, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.

### Computer Bytes

A Macintosh user group for architects, engineers, and contractors in Orange County was recently established in Irvine, Calif. Members include one-employee builders working out of a home office as well as large AEC firms. The group, called Mac+AEC, meets every third Wednesday, and the regular agenda includes announcements of job openings, new products, and special events, along with technical tips and demonstrations. For information on how to join, call John Stebbins at 714/559-0205 or Bob Waddell at 714/553-1117.

A set of construction forms and contracts developed by a home-builder is available on PC and Mac diskettes. It includes primary construction and subcontractor contracts, specifications, change orders, and a variety of scheduling and estimating checklists, all of which can be edited using almost any word processing software. The complete set costs \$123 on diskette, and is available in printed form as well. For a free catalog, contact Wilhelm Publishing, Box 922, Columbia, MO 65205-0922; 800/842-2027.

An electronic dimensional takeoff system called Measuremouse includes a precision mouse and software that increases the speed and accuracy of linear, area, and volume calculations. The stand-alone program can be used in conjunction with PC estimating or spreadsheet software. According to the software's developer, Measuremouse is easier to use and faster than more expensive digitizers. It costs \$495 from Bright Systems, 1453 Tallevast Road, Sarasota, FL 34243; 813/359-3065.

—Sal Alfano