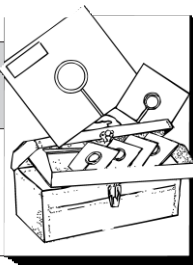# Floor Plans Made Easy

by Craig Savage

Chief Architect version 2.0 ($595) requires an IBM-compatible 386 processor, 4MB RAM, one hard drive and one floppy drive, a mouse, and Windows 3.1. For more information, contact Advanced Relational Technology, 15640 Oakridge Ct., Morgan Hill, CA 95037; 800/482-4433.

A new Windows-based design tool called *Chief Architect* was created to do one thing well: design floor plans with client participation. That's a tough assignment: It requires being quick and simple enough to compete with pencil and paper so the client doesn't get lost in the process. But Chief Architect lives up to the challenge. Ordinarily, a program like this means spending hours reading manuals and battling on the telephone with technical support — a long learning curve. In contrast, after 30 minutes with Chief Architect, I had the program loaded, the Quick Start Card memorized, and was well on my way to designing my first floor plan, complete with doors, windows, cabinets, furniture, and plumbing and electrical fixtures.

Tool Palette

To design a floor plan with the Chief, you work from a palette of 12 tools. To draw double-line walls, for example, you use the wall tool, which is customizable to different wall widths (4 inches, 6 inches, etc.). With the mouse, you pull a wall out in a straight line till it reaches the length you want as indicated by a digital readout. You don't need to hit intersections exactly because when walls come close to each other, they automatically snap together to make a corner. The program encourages you to draw all the walls straight through, then come back later to create openings. This means that closets and hallways are first drawn as closed boxes into which you can either "cut" an opening in the wall or place a door or window using the proper tool.
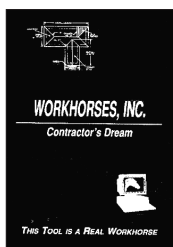
To place a door, for example, you first click on the door icon in the tool palette, which changes the bottom row of tools to icons for specific doors, such as swinging, bifold, bypassing, pocket, and garage doors. (The window tool works the same way, with four types of windows: double-hung, bow, bay, and sliding.) You place the door you've selected into the drawing by clicking on the wall in the proper spot. To change the width, you pull with the mouse on small "handles" at each end of the symbol. A third button in the center of the symbol lets you drag the door or window along the wall, and handy dimensions pop up from the outside wall corners to continually tell you where the center of the door is. To establish the door swing arc, you pull an end handle into the room.

Setting base and wall cabinets follows the same "select and place" method. Cabinets are stacked in 24-inch modules, just like real cabinets, including corner cabinets and custom end units. A "staircase tool" and a "fireplace tool" complete the major parts. You can also check the plan for clearances by placing furniture.

When you and your client are happy with the plan, the Chief will automatically dimension it, label the rooms, and add all outlets, lights, switches, fans, and telephone and TV jacks. Finally, before your client leaves your office with a printout of the plan, you can run the "Plan Check" function, which scans the plan to see if you forgot smoke alarms, egress windows, exhaust fans, and GFCI circuits.

By the time you read this, version 2.0 will be on the market. It can generate interior perspectives and elevations, as well as a 3-D overview, which is like looking into the house from above. It also includes CAD line, circle, and arc drawing functions, so you can create your own symbol libraries. The new version can also produce a bill of materials that can be exported as a tab-delimited file to many spreadsheets, word processors, and databases, and to some estimating programs.
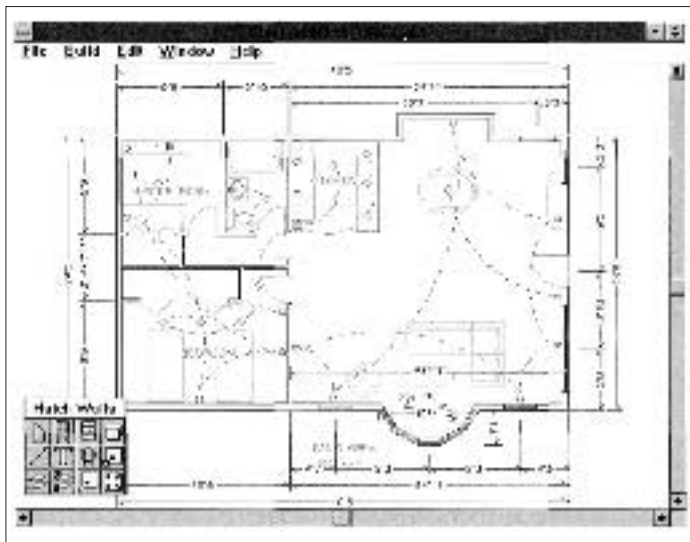
Recurring Dream

Contractor's Dream version 4.5 ($275) uses System 6, but takes advantage of System 7. It is available directly from Workhorses, 805 14th St., Golden, CO 80401; 800/777-2477.

Contractor's Dream is a stand-alone estimating application designed "by a carpenter for use by contractors." Basically, it's a "stick" estimator that requires you to input every item to get an estimate. Each item called up from the built-in database has its own screen, which holds detailed information about the item, such as cost per unit. When you enter the measurements in feet and inches, the program calculates quantities and price. Labor is treated as a separate item, a feature I like, but which some may find cumbersome.

The program lets you build assemblies — groups of materials found in a unit of construction — by clicking the mouse on separate items. For instance, one linear foot of an exterior wall assembly might contain one 2x6, 8 square feet of drywall, 8 square feet of R-19 fiberglass batt, 8 square feet of $1/2$-

With Chief Architect, you can draw and rearrange floor plans while your clients watch. It automatically dimensions the walls, and lets you place windows, doors, and electrical devices. You can even rearrange the furniture.

In addition to using assemblies to take off floor and wall systems, Contractor's Dream also helps calculate cut lists for stairs, rafters, and other building elements. A separate window (inset) displays the quantity, description, and cost of each item in the estimate.

inch CDX, 12 board feet of lap siding, plus nails, paint, and other materials. Once the assemblies are made, you simply key in the overall dimensions, and the program calculates the total cost of the assembly and provides a complete list of the materials it includes. The database contains 600 items, but like all such cost books, you should use them only as a starting point for your own costs.

The program has four reports, each of which presents the same estimate information in a different way. All four can be viewed, edited, and printed.

You can also export estimates to word processors, spreadsheets, and other databases, where you can change the reports to suit your needs.

Finally, Contractor's Dream helps you calculate rafter cuts, stair layout, window and door header sizes, and more. The program uses actual dimensions (a 2x4 is $1\frac{1}{2}"$x$3\frac{1}{2}"$), so the results are very accurate.

The purchase price of $275 — "less than a nail gun," as the advertisement says — includes an interactive audio tape tutorial, a thorough, easy-to-comprehend manual, and unlimited toll-free phone support (which you probably won't need considering how simple the program is to use). Contractor's Dream is the program that many of you have been looking for, and it works for anyone who can start up a Mac (or a PC, for that matter, since the original version was made for DOS). ■

Craig Savage, a longtime builder and Macintosh user, owns Savage Co., in Carpinteria, Calif., and publishes the Macintosh Construction Forum, as well as Windows on Construction, a newsletter covering Windows construction applications.

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

How often do you forget the name of a Windows file, but remember at least some of the text that's in it? A new, inexpensive program called *Eclipse Find 1.0* ($99) uses an index system to find text-based information. The index files use up 10% of the disk space occupied by the data files themselves, but indexes make finding the file you need much quicker than searching every file one word at a time. For more information, contact Phoenix Technologies (846 University Ave., Norwood, MA 02062; 800/452-0120).

If you're looking for a way to store more data, consider replacing your 3.5-inch floppy drive with the *Iomega Floptical PC*

Powered drive (about $399). It reads and writes optically to floppy disks that hold up to 21MB of data. At $20 each, blank disks cost about the same per MB as a regular floppy. The drive also reads standard double- and high-density floppy disks. For more information, contact Iomega Corp. (1821 W. 4000 S., Roy, UT 84067; 800/777-6179).

What do you do with outdated computer equipment? For help with the logistics of donating your old computers to a school, call *Computers 4 Kids* (203/754-5560). If you'd like to donate to disabled persons, contact the *National Cristina Foundation* (800/274-7846).