

# 40 YEARS OF MAC

Four decades ago, Apple introduced the first Mac to the world. Let's celebrate the lineup's many hits, and a few misses too

WRITTEN BY CARRIE MARSHALL

**T**HE VERY FIRST Mac launched in January 1984, and to celebrate its 40th anniversary we're going back to the very beginning. In our historical tour we'll discover the Macs that paved the way for today's magical M3s, trace macOS from System 1.0 to Sonoma, and explore the evolution of our favorite Apple accessories too.

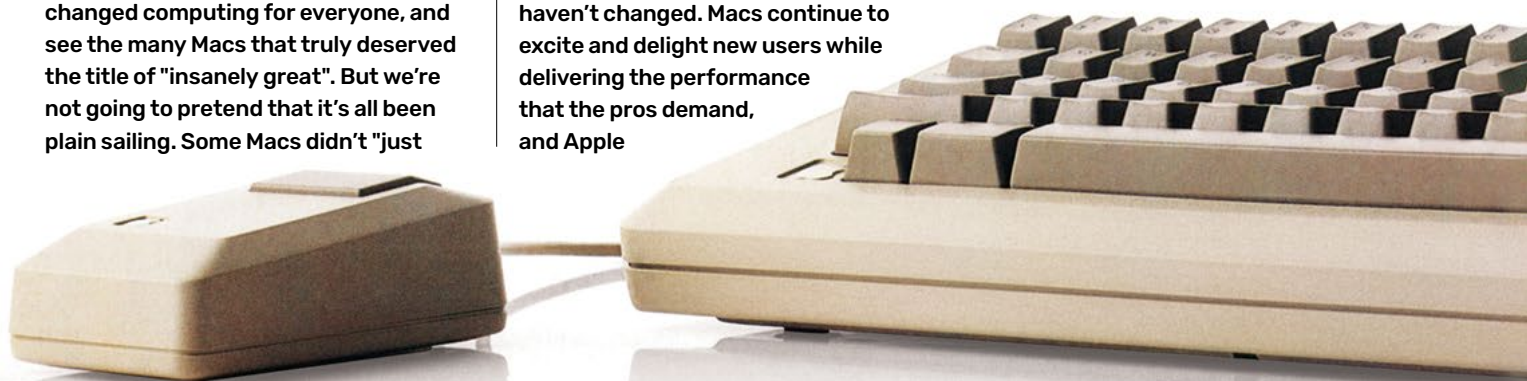
You'll find out how the first Mac changed computing for everyone, and see the many Macs that truly deserved the title of "insanely great". But we're not going to pretend that it's all been plain sailing. Some Macs didn't "just

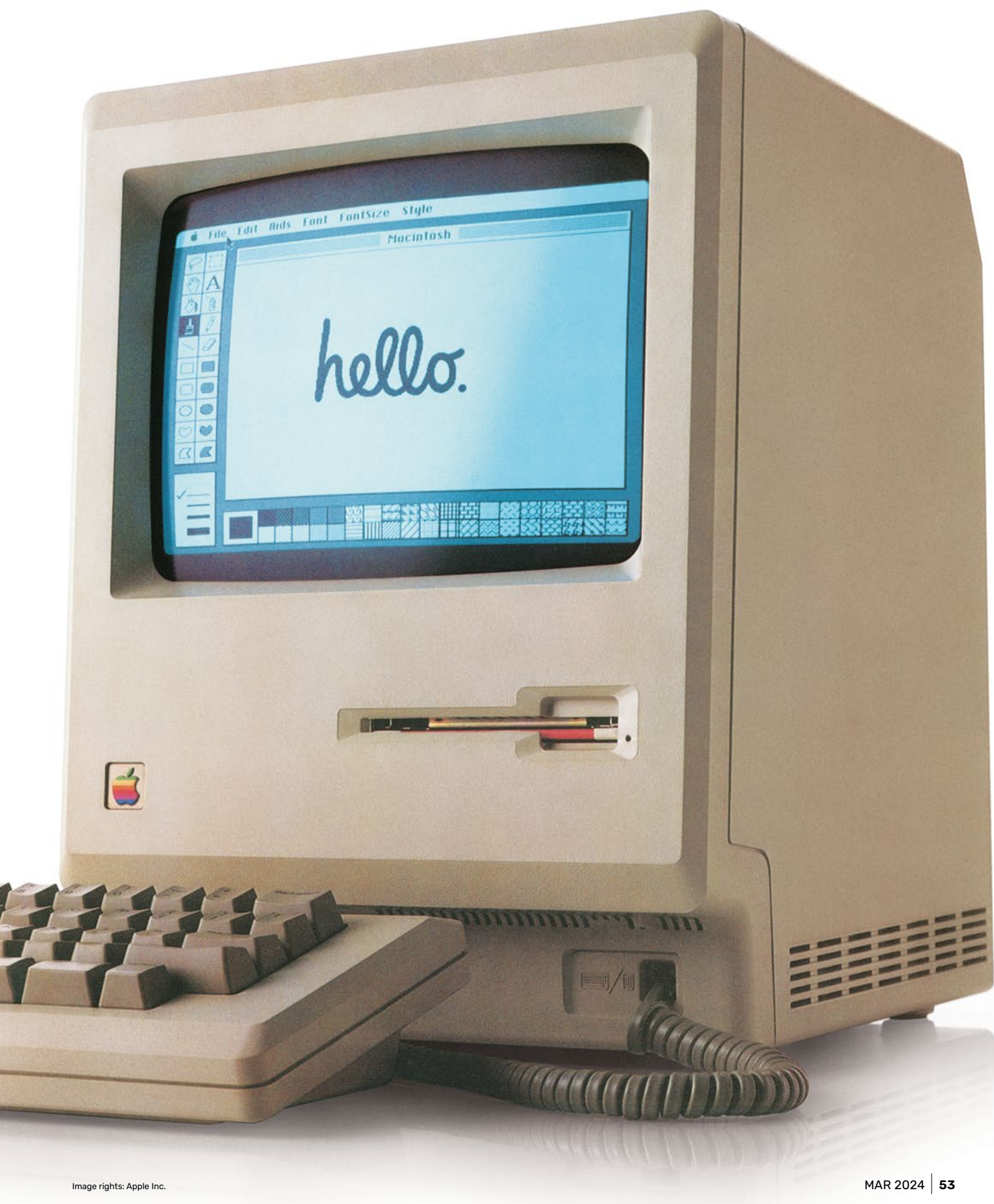
work", and we're going to breathe a big sigh when we recall some of the Mac's less endearing designs and the decisions behind them. We'll tut at the Touch Bar, wonder how you're supposed to charge your Magic Mouse when you're using it, and reminisce about the commercial failure that was the ill-fated G4 Cube.

We've come a very long way since the first Macintosh, but some things haven't changed. Macs continue to excite and delight new users while delivering the performance that the pros demand, and Apple

continues to innovate in everything from the silicon inside to the pixels that power your Mac's display.

To make one computer as good as the Mac is impressive; to continue raising the bar over not just years but decades is uniquely Apple. That's why we're not only excited to look back at what's been achieved over the last 40 years, but about the future too.







# From Macintosh to losing the plot

How the Mac arose from an expensive defeat and changed computing forever

**T**HE MAC WAS never intended to be Apple's star: that was the Lisa, Apple's first computer with a graphical interface. While impressive, the Lisa was also unreliable and incredibly expensive: when it launched in 1983 it cost \$9,995. An IBM PC was around \$1,500.

While the Lisa was busy bombing, Jef Raskin's skunkworks project was working on something much less expensive and, as it

would turn out, much more important. Raskin, Burrell Smith and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak were focusing on a more modest Apple computer without a hard disk, multitasking or as much memory. The team was joined by Steve Jobs, who effectively took it over when Wozniak was recovering from a plane crash. Their project, the Macintosh, was an instant hit.



Apple's Lisa was more powerful than the Mac, but it was also much more expensive and a much harder sell.

## Classic Mac: Macintosh 128K

The very first Apple Macintosh, launched in 1984, was a little underpowered — the Macintosh 512K addressed that shortly afterwards — but the OG Mac delivered on the Lisa's promises for considerably less cash. It was simple to set up and use, came with the wonderful MacPaint, and would soon invent desktop publishing too.

## Software led

Software deserves much of the credit. In much the same way that Lotus 123 sold IBM PCs, the Mac benefited from the launch of Aldus PageMaker in 1985. The combination of PageMaker, the Mac's innovative What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) interface and the LaserWriter, Apple's laser printer, invented a whole new industry: desktop publishing. Bill Atkinson's HyperCard (1987) was another crucial differentiator. With its linked cards containing text, images, audio and video, it was decades ahead of its time.

Steve Jobs left Apple in 1985, fired by CEO John Sculley in part because the Lisa and the Mac weren't selling as well as Sculley

hoped, and partly because Jobs was not an easy man to work for or with. Jobs' part of the Apple story had barely begun, but at the time it looked like the end of the line for the mercurial co-founder. He was replaced by Jean-Louis Gassée as head of the Mac division and, under Gassée's watch, Apple made a great Mac and a not-so-great one.

The great Mac was the Macintosh II, a much more powerful Macintosh that

## Timeline: 1984–1997

1984-85

### Macintosh

> The original Mac was a revelation and a big hit, delivering many of the Lisa's best ideas for considerably less cash. A great advert helped too.

1984-86

### Macintosh 512k

> Arguably the first really capable Macintosh, with enough memory to shine, and the earliest Mac to support Apple's new AppleShare networking introduced in '87.



1987-90

### Macintosh II

> This highly expandable Mac was the first Macintosh with color graphics and the first to be sold without a built-in display like the one in the Macintosh SE.



1989-91

### Macintosh Portable

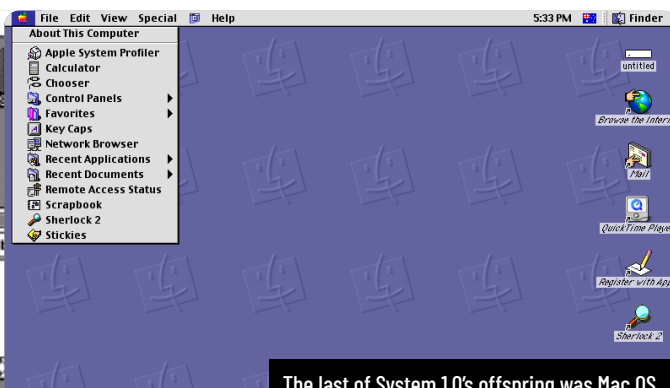
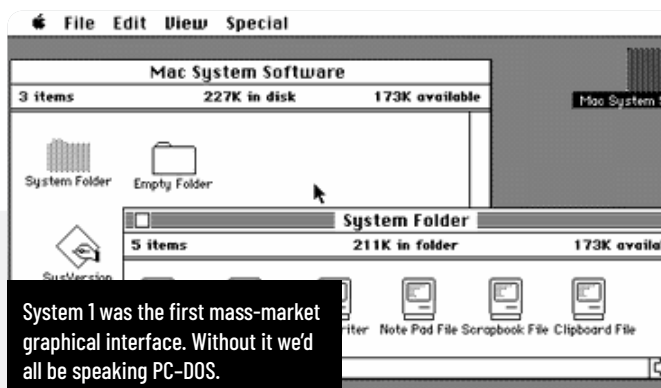
> The first battery-powered Mac was ahead of its time: the limitations of late-80s technologies meant that it weighed a ton and cost a fortune. Sales weren't stellar.



1991-92

### PowerBook 100

> If at first you don't succeed... the \$2,500 Sony-made PowerBook got the mobile Mac right, and would later be named one of the greatest computers of all time by PC World.



# From System 1 to Mac OS 9

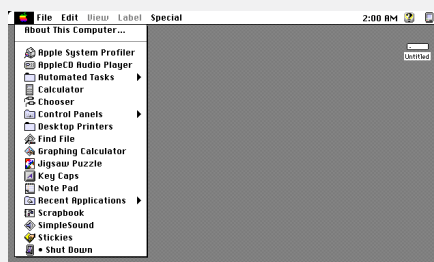


System 1.0 gave the world the desktop, created at Xerox PARC but popularized by the Mac. Instead of

command line entry, you could organize your documents just like you would on a desk – and throw them in the Trash just like in real life too. This was computing anyone could understand, and it was a huge milestone in bringing computers to the masses.

Apple's graphical user interface beat Windows to market by two years. Some of its features, such as the Finder, are

still with us today – but many of its limitations, like Macs' lack of a hard disk and subsequent inability to multitask



System 7 was arguably the peak of Apple's early OS, with QuickTime, file sharing and multitasking.

– are long gone. System 1 included the menu bar, which it took from the Lisa and which had the Apple, File, Edit, View and Special menus. Its Desk Accessories are clearly a precursor to Sonoma's Widgets too.

System 5 introduced basic if clunky multitasking, but the Mac OS of the era arguably peaked with 1991's System 7. That introduced better multitasking, virtual memory, QuickTime and file sharing. Mac OS 9 shipped in 1999, but Apple was already paving the way for a very different operating system.

delighted power users and was a big hit with consumers. The not-so-great Mac was the Macintosh Portable, Apple's first laptop. It was transportable rather than portable and cost twice as much as the first Mac, and Gassée got the axe shortly after its release.

The Macintosh II had begun development without Jobs' knowledge. Jobs was against features such as expansion slots and color displays, both of which the Macintosh II sported. It was Apple's first modular Mac and despite an initial price tag of nearly \$5,500 it

sold well alongside the same year's compact Macintosh SE. But with both Jobs and Gassée gone, Apple had lost its spark, and over the next decade it became a company of incremental improvements, not game-changing leaps.



1991-95

## Macintosh Quadra

> Apple's high-end Macs used a new Motorola chipset, making them the fastest Macs yet – as well as some of the ugliest Macs thanks to their rather PC-esque cases.



1992-97

## Macintosh Performa

> Apple's home computers are largely remembered for their confusing model range and the lack of retailers' skill or care in setting up and selling them.



1994-2006

## Power Macintosh

> The PowerPC chip gave Macs a spectacular power boost, and this first PowerPC Mac lasted an incredible 12 years as the PowerPC processors got better and better.



1995-96

## PowerBook 5300

> The PowerPC energized Apple as well as the Mac. This first PowerPC laptop was great: hot-swappable drives and PC Card slots added practicality to its power.



1992-97

## PowerBook Duo

> Apple's ultra-portables were the MacBook Airs of their time, delivering exceptional portability and diminutive dimensions without too many compromises.

# From iMac to MacBook Pro

In dire need of a revival, Apple soon hit upon a winning streak with the success of the revolutionary first iMac

**B**Y 1997, APPLE was close to going out of business. Returning CEO Steve Jobs quickly diagnosed the problem: Apple was making too many products and they weren't good enough. To use Jobs' favorite quote from hockey player Wayne Gretzky, Apple needed to "skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been". And with the iMac, Apple did. It's hard to overstate the effect the iMac had on everything. Doomsayers mocked its lack of

floppy drive and the candy-colored cases, but those colors were a tonic in a world of beige boxes and the iMac would influence the design of everything from steam irons to sex toys.

Apple sold nearly 280,000 iMacs in just six weeks, and nearly half of its sales were to first-time computer buyers. Another 20% were switchers from Windows PCs. By 2001, Apple had sold five million iMacs.



Like the iMac, the candy-colored iBook caught the popular imagination. Together they transformed computer design and went on to influence tons of other products.

## Classic Mac: iMac G3

We're not exaggerating: this Mac changed everything. It reversed Apple's declining fortunes, it changed product design for the better and best of all, it made computers fun again in an era where everything was beige. If it weren't for the iMac there'd be no iPhone, no iPad, no Apple Watch, and the world would be a much duller place.

## The product grid

In 2002, the iMac got a makeover in the form of the Pixar-esque iMac G4, aka the anglepoise iMac. It changed again in 2004 to the flatter and less fun iMac G5, which has stayed much the same while getting ever thinner and with ever smaller bezels. The G5 and the current M3 iMac may be nearly a decade apart, but you can see the shared DNA. Steve Jobs also introduced his famous product grid: consumer and pro, desktop and

portable. That brought us the iMac and iBook, the Power Mac and the PowerBook.

That lineup would change slightly over time. The iBook and PowerBook became the MacBook and MacBook Pro in 2006, their PowerPC processors replaced by Intel ones. The move to Intel was hugely important, because the PowerPCs that Apple had previously relied upon were no longer delivering what Apple needed them to. By

moving to Intel, Apple was able to close the performance gap with PCs. It would stick with Intel inside until history began to repeat and Apple once again found itself moving to a

## The move to Intel meant Apple was able to close the performance gap with PCs

## Timeline: 1998–2012



1998–2003

### iMac

> An all-in-one computer without a floppy drive that expected you to connect with a new standard called USB? It'll never take off, critics said. But the iMac G3 was a computing revolution that saved Apple.



1997–1999

### Power Mac G3

> The iMac's bigger sibling may have been cute on the outside, especially the Blue and White model, but inside it was a beast that smoked Intel PCs and was bettered only by its successor, the Power Mac G4.



2001–2006

### PowerBook G4

> The TiBook, as it was nicknamed, put pro-level Mac power into a gorgeous, light titanium frame. It lived for a further three years in a redesigned aluminum version before making way for the Pro.



1999–2001

### iBook G3

> We were sad to see the end of the colorful clamshell iBooks, but the more sober snow iBook made for a wonderful home and college computer. It may have looked less cute, but it was a better computer.

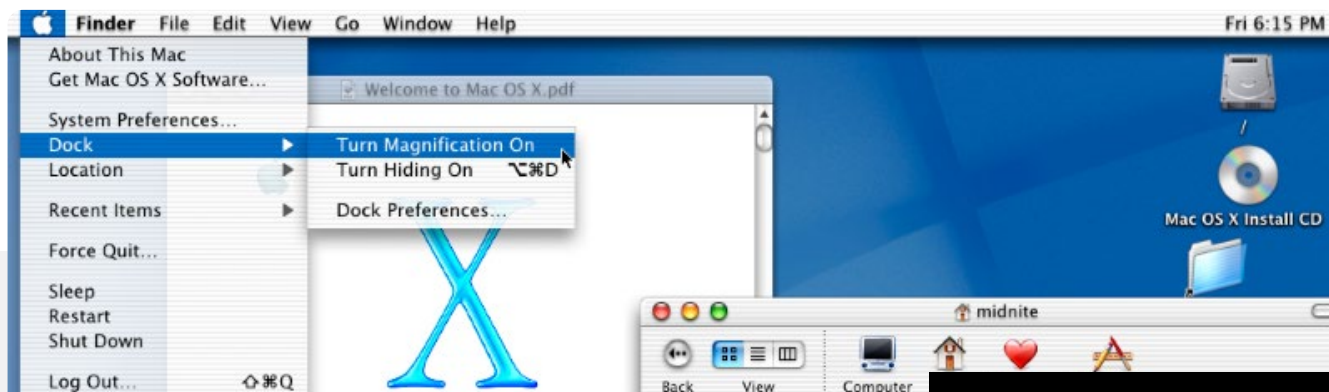


2000–2001

### Power Mac G4 Cube

> Remembered mainly as one of Steve Jobs' mistakes: the fanless Cube was ahead of its time. It cost a fortune, wasn't very expandable, and suffered from manufacturing problems.





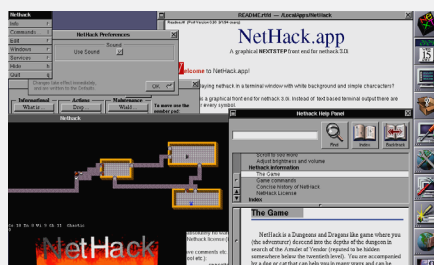
## X marks the spot



When Steve Jobs left Apple in 1985, he founded NeXT to make computers for higher education. NeXT's operating system, NeXTSTEP, was much more advanced than Apple's System 2.0: it had built-in networking, relatively easy object-oriented programming, UNIX-based security and a really good-looking interface to boot. It played a crucial role in the creation of the first World Wide Web browser and the development of the game *DOOM*. NeXT struggled to make sales, and when Apple was shopping around for a next-

gen operating system in 1995, Jobs pushed hard for Apple to buy it.

Apple did, and that acquisition included some of NeXT's biggest brains.



Steve Jobs persuaded Apple to buy his post-Apple company, NeXT, in order to get the NeXTSTEP OS.

OS X blended beautiful design with the industrial-strength underpinnings of the UNIX operating system.

At Apple they took the technology they'd developed at NeXT and used it as the foundation for a new Apple OS, OS X, which launched in 2000.

OS X was beautiful: its glass-like, almost 3D display was to operating systems such as Windows 98 what the iMac was to beige PCs. But it wasn't just a pretty face. Under the hood it had the power, flexibility and networking of UNIX in the form of its Darwin kernel, the core of the entire OS — and it would be the foundation not just of macOS, but iOS too. iOS would go on to be adapted for iPadOS, watchOS and tvOS.

different kind of processor, 2020's Apple-made M1.

The MacBook and MacBook Pro were joined by a third mobile Mac in 2008 when Steve Jobs took to the stage and showed off a standard buff envelope. To gasps, he pulled

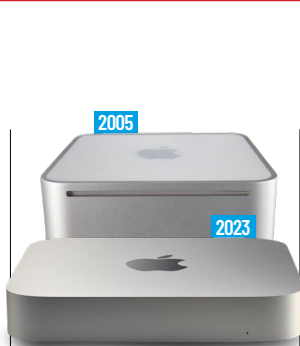
out the MacBook Air. Given that even the slimmest notebooks at the time weighed about 2kg (4.4lbs) and had microscopic displays, the MacBook Air looked like a miracle. It was also the beginning of Apple's increasing obsession with super-slim

notebooks, an obsession that some people reckon went too far, but it was enormously influential: you can see echoes of the Air's design everywhere in today's notebooks, and it would inform the design of future MacBook Pros too.



### 2002-2004 iMac G4

> Dubbed the "sunflower" because of its shape, the G4 put the computer in a rounded base and a flat screen on a movable arm, once again showing that Apple did indeed Think Different about computer design.



### 2005- Mac mini

> Nearly 20 and still going strong, Apple's smallest, most affordable Mac was clearly inspired by the Cube. Many found homes as network or internet servers, but it's also a really great desktop computer.



### 2003-2006 Power Mac G5

> Apple's souring relationship with Motorola over the PowerPC processors couldn't have been clearer than in the Power Mac: Jobs promised that it would hit 3GHz speeds within a year, but it never did. Intel awaited.



### 2008- MacBook Air

> The original Air was unveiled to gasps: how did they make a Mac so thin? Like the G3 Mac it dumped a hard drive, in this case the optical one, and was widely copied: its influence is evident everywhere in PC land.



### 2008-2012 MacBook Pro

> The Unibody MacBook Pro took Air design cues but delivered pro power and an enormous clickable trackpad; the 17-inch began Apple's (not universally popular) move to glued-in batteries rather than user-swappable ones.

# From the 5K iMac to the MacBook Pro

The end of the Steve Jobs era and the beginning of something even bigger



**W**HEN STEVE JOBS died in 2011, many pundits said it was the end of Apple: in the popular imagination, Steve Jobs was Apple and Apple was Steve Jobs. Who could fill such iconic shoes? Tim Cook? But Apple's logistics wizard is not a man you should

## Classic Mac: MacBook Pro M3

With a choice of M3, M3 Pro or M3 Max chipsets inside, this MacBook Pro is the most powerful mobile Mac that Apple has ever made — and yet it looks barely bigger than the MacBook Air. It's an astonishing machine that delivers exceptional power, but Sonoma means it's also exceptionally easy to use — and it has ports aplenty.

underestimate, and under his watch Apple became a trillion-dollar company in 2018. It was Cook who turned Jobs' ideas — the iPhone, the iPad, and projects begun during the Jobs era such as the Apple Watch — into globe-conquering successes.

But the question that dogged Apple from the day of his succession was simple: what would happen when Jobs' ideas ran out? Those questions got louder when design guru Jonathan Ive left Apple in 2019, apparently frustrated by Apple's move to a less design-focused company.

## Today and tomorrow

But Jony Ive's tenure wasn't without its mistakes. The hockey-puck Magic Mouse is one of his, as was the terrible "butterfly" keyboard and Touch Bar of the MacBook Pro. And the focus on style sometimes triumphed substance, such as the lack of ports or lack of battery life on the Intel MacBook Pro.

The Mac's DNA might not be obvious in the Vision Pro, but it's there in everything from the operating system to the processor that powers it.

Today's Apple is putting the ports back into Macs and focuses more on practical products like the Mac Studio than attention-grabbing but compromised machines like Darth Vader's trash can, the Ive-era Mac Pro. And crucially, today's Apple makes its own silicon; no longer do Macs have to wait for PowerPCs to improve or Intel Cores to get more efficient.

Has some of the Mac magic gone? Maybe: it's hard to get too excited about the outside of the M3 Mac, which power aside is largely indistinguishable from its predecessor. But more than ever before, Apple's control not just of the computer, its operating system and the actual engine means it can deliver ever more incredible and powerful computers that deliver on the ultimate Apple promise: It Just Works.

## Timeline: 2013–2023



2013–2019

### Mac Pro

> Phil Schiller showed off the unique, cylindrical Pro with a dig at critics — "can't innovate anymore, my ass" — but it was hard to expand and Apple didn't update it for six years. A rare modern-Apple flop.



2014–2021

### iMac Retina 5K

> The 5K version of the 27-inch Retina iMac offered all the power of a Pro-level Mac without any of the expandability. It had a great screen, but Apple canned it in favor of the Mac Studio.



2015–2019

### MacBook (12-inch)

> Rumors say Apple's bringing this size back. We hope so: the Retina MacBook was one of Apple's best-ever portables, light and great despite the horrible butterfly keyboard.



2016–2023

### MacBook Pro with Touch Bar

> Some liked the Touch Bar, but many didn't: the context-sensitive buttons didn't deliver the iPad/Mac crossover hoped for, limiting touch functionality to a strip above the keyboard.



2019–2023

### Mac Pro

> The design of the 2019 Mac Pro returned to the beloved cheese grater tower, boasting exceptional expandability as well as power. This would be the last of the Intel Macs.

# Access(orize) all areas!



1985-88

## LaserWriter

> One of the very first mass-market laser printers, the LaserWriter launched the very same day as PageMaker and effectively invented desktop publishing.



1994-97

## QuickTake

> The \$749 QuickTake 100 was one of the first consumer digital cameras, but camera brands soon stole its thunder and it was another product culled by Steve Jobs.



2001-2022

## iPod

> The iPod music player did for digital music what the Mac did for computing, and it laid the foundations for the iPhone. It's one of Apple's greatest hits.



1998-2004

## Studio Display

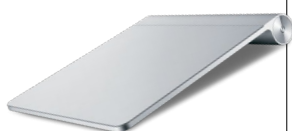
> Apple's first flat-screen LCD helped move us away from CRT monitors with its 15in flat panel. Larger models still came with CRTs but were discontinued in May 2001.



2005-2009

## Mighty Mouse

> The predecessor to today's Magic Mouse looked lovely but was accused of style over substance; many found it uncomfortable and it was hard to clean the ball.



2010-

## Magic Trackpad

> The initial model of Apple's Magic Trackpad was beautifully designed if overpriced, but the arrival of Force Touch in the second generation made this more of a must-have.



2009-

## Magic Mouse

> Similar to the Mighty Mouse, this offering was also divisive: the first Magic Mouse had limited features and the second's charging port is in a silly place. Also not great for RSI sufferers either.



1999-2011

## Cinema Display

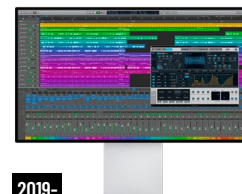
> The precursor to the Thunderbolt Display came in a total of six different sizes: 20, 22, 23, 24, 27 and 30 inches and delivered good quality in a stylish form for power users.



2011-2016

## Thunderbolt Display

> Apple switched from Mini DisplayPort and USB to a single Thunderbolt connector, offering effortless daisy-chaining of two monitors with a single cable.



2019-

## Pro Display XDR

> The Extreme Dynamic Range display brought Apple back into the display business with considerable style, an exceptionally high specification, and a price tag to match.



2020-2022

## MacBook Air

> The perfect Mac laptop? Featuring air thinness and Apple silicon M1 power. The only reason it's no longer around is because Apple's put an even better chip inside, the M2. It's an astonishingly good laptop.



2020-

## Mac mini

> Before it got Apple silicon, the mini was a modest Mac suited to modest tasks and network server duties. With an M-series chip, it's excellent: we use an M2 Pro version to run massive Logic Pro projects.



2022-

## Mac Studio

> What do you get if you send a Mac mini to the gym? This pro-spec powerhouse that crams apparently impossible power into its tiny case. It sits between the Mac mini and Pro and is great for creative apps.



2023-

## M2 Mac Pro

> The first Mac Pro to run Apple's own silicon delivers performance that left the Intel-powered version in the dust – but Apple silicon means you can't upgrade the memory and graphics after purchase.



2023-

## MacBook Pro

> This is the current state of the Apple art, a laptop so fast in its M3 Max incarnation that if you drink instant coffee while using it, you'll travel backwards in time. In two words: insanely great.