July 2025
Vol. XLIV, No 7

KEYSTONE MacCentral

printout

Keystone MacCentral Macintosh Users Group ❖ www.keystonemac.com

Keystone MacCentral July 15th Meeting

Please see your membership email for the links to this month's Zoom meeting or email us at KeystoneMacCentral@mac.com.

During our program this month we plan to discuss

- ☞ Create Stunning Photo Books with Apple Photos

- ☞ Make your iPhone Pictures Better — Editing Portrait Photos & Live Photos

We have virtual meetings via Zoom on the third Tuesday of each month.

Emails will be sent out prior to each meeting. Follow the directions/invitation each month on our email – that is, just click on the link to join our meeting.

Contents

Keystone MacCentral is a not-for-profit group of Macintosh enthusiasts who generally meet the third Tuesday of every month to exchange information, participate in question-and-answer sessions, view product demonstrations, and obtain resource materials that will help them get the most out of their computer
systems. Meetings are free and open to the public. **The *Keystone MacCentral printout*** is the official newsletter of Keystone MacCentral and an independent publication not affiliated or otherwise associated with or sponsored or sanctioned by any for-profit organization, including Apple Inc.

By Adam Engst

Major Changes Coming in OS 26

Apple's WWDC 2025 keynote once again felt like the lightning round of a "What's New In?" game show, featuring categories for each of the platforms. Oddly, Apple presented them in the order of iOS, watchOS, tvOS, macOS, visionOS, and iPadOS, perhaps to conclude with the highly positive changes coming to the iPad. (I'm once again condensing the entire collection to OS for space-limited headlines.)

With only a few pauses to switch presenters, the company raced through announcements and brief demos of numerous new features, or, as Tim Cook redundantly said, "new innovations." Although the feature selection often felt disjointed, two themes emerged: the new Liquid Glass interface design and Apple Intelligence. More on those shortly.

Apple also swiftly confirmed the rumors regarding the version numbers, which will all increase to 26, much as car manufacturers designate their model years. And yes, as was leaked a few days ago, the name for macOS 26 will be Tahoe, named after Lake Tahoe.

As usual, developer betas of the new operating systems are now available, with a public beta scheduled for July and initial releases in the "fall," which typically means September to coincide with new iPhone models. Although we'll be sharing all the details soon for this year's version of "The Real System Requirements for Apple's 2024 Operating Systems" (12 July 2024), the quick summary is that some of the oldest supported hardware models from last year have been phased out, although several Intel-based Macs still survive. At Six Colors, Dan Moren writes that Tahoe will be the final version of macOS to support Intel chips, so Intel-based Macs will stop receiving even security updates at the end of 2028.

For a preview of what's coming to each platform other than tvOS 26, which received only a press release, scroll through these pages:

- macOS 26 Tahoe
- iOS 26
- iPadOS 26
- watchOS 26
- visionOS 26
- tvOS 26

Now, let's explore the changes I believe will significantly enhance your daily experience with Apple devices.

Liquid Glass Becomes Apple's Visual Paradigm

Liquid Glass is Apple's first major interface redesign since iOS 7 in 2013, and although I'll admit to a snarky comment about rearranging deck chairs while Apple's Craig Federighi introduced it, it will radically affect everything we do.

In large part, that's because Liquid Glass extends across all of Apple's platforms. In the past, although there were certainly many interface commonalities, each platform had some unique aspects that may have made sense in isolation but didn't support a unified experience for those switching among devices.

While Liquid Glass is the name for the new design language, Apple also seems to be thinking about it as a real-world material that blurs the lines between hardware and software. It's translucent and behaves like glass in the real world, at least if glass were sufficiently malleable to squish and wiggle. (And no, real glass isn't liquid.) Because Liquid Glass controls are inherently see-through, they absorb their color from the surrounding content. That's not entirely new or good—I have long turned on Reduce Transparency on my devices to ensure that screenshots don't have distractingly different colors based on the current background. I also worry that text in a Liquid Glass object—like a Lock Screen notification or Safari toolbar—will lack

sufficient contrast to be readable. I assume Reduce Transparency will remain available in Accessibility settings; we'll see how well it works.

There are functional changes as well. Liquid Glass controls sit on top of content, automatically giving way to allow the user to focus on the content and returning to the forefront when the user interacts with them. Additionally, context menus expand into scannable lists, eliminating the need for scrolling.

I'm sure there will be complaints about Liquid Glass being change for change's sake, and some of those changes may be a step backward in usability. Nevertheless, we hope that Apple's experience in interface design and the cross-platform consistency of Liquid Glass will make it overall easier to use Apple devices. Feedback from users and developers during the beta may help tone down some of the more extreme changes. Regardless, Liquid Glass will affect everything you do after you upgrade.

Apple Intelligence Opens to Developers

I'm going to give Apple executives, engineers, and designers credit and assume that they know Apple Intelligence is mediocre at best. Nevertheless, they can't—and didn't—admit that in any way. So it wasn't surprising that the company plowed on, briefly describing the current features and introducing some new AI-powered options.

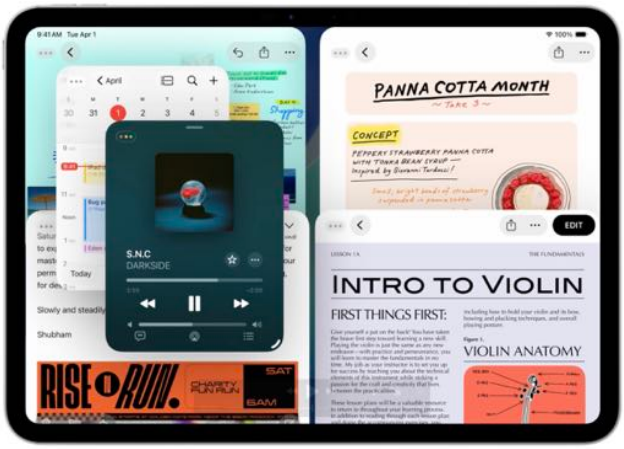
But not everything has to come from Apple, which is why the second most important announcement of the keynote was the new Foundation Models framework. With it, developers will be able to tap directly into the on-device large language model at the heart of Apple Intelligence. The Foundation Models framework should be fast, private, and free, and it will work even when offline, which is a compelling proposition.

On the other hand, on-device models are inherently less capable than those, such as ChatGPT and Claude, that run on powerful data center hardware. Plus, the ability of those services to incorporate real-time information from the Web has been a game-changer. Although I don't want to bet against the combined creativity of the Apple developer community, it's hard to imagine the kind of magic that comes out of the top large language models being accessible on an offline iPad.

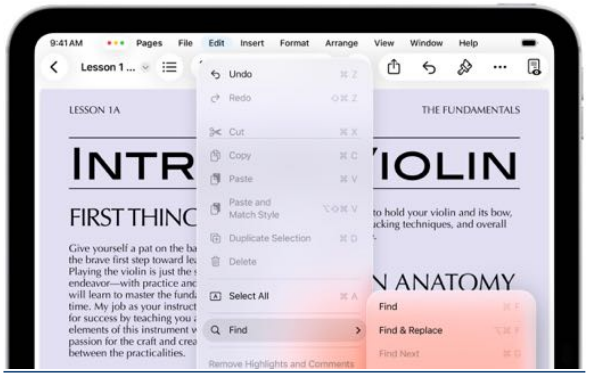
The Mac-ification of the iPad

Hallelujah! Apple has finally acknowledged that getting real work done on an iPad requires the kind of interface that we have on the Mac. Previous efforts to provide multitasking, multiple simultaneous windows, and access to the file system have been tepid. iPadOS 26 brings numerous changes that will make using an iPad feel much more like using a Mac and, I'm willing to bet, far more effective for real-world work. The changes include:

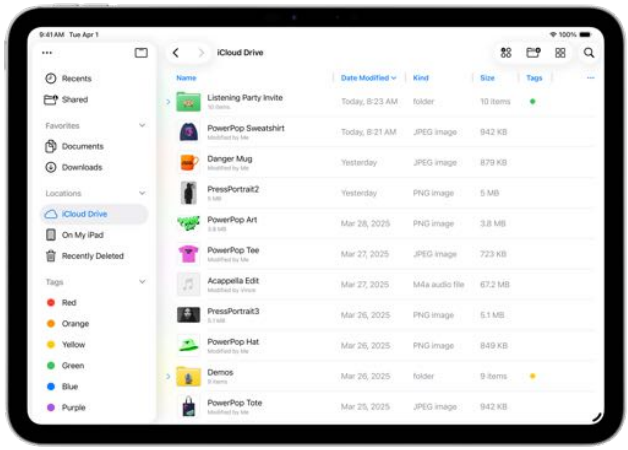
- Window management: Whereas iPadOS was previously limited to various split views, every app can now be turned into a standalone window that you can move and resize freely. Windows remember their size and position, and you can also tile them flexibly, with options to split the screen into two, three, or four pieces. The familiar traffic light window controls from the Mac make an appearance along with the macOS Move & Resize and Fill & Arrange options. Swiping up invokes Exposé, allowing you to see all windows and witch to the desired one easily.



- Menu bar and Dock: Although the iPadOS menu bar will look and act like the Mac's menu bar, it will appear only when you swipe down from the top of the screen. That's sensible: as with full screen mode on the Mac, the menu bar could be distracting in apps that assume they can take over the entire screen. You will also be able to put folders in the Dock and access their contents in much the same way docked folders appear as a stack on the Mac.

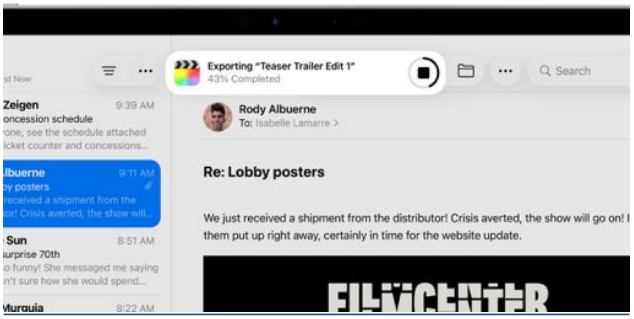


- Filesystem access: The Files app retains its name, but it looks as though it's going to feel a lot more like a Finder window. It has collapsible folders, and you'll be able to resize the column widths. Folders can be given custom colors and icons. You can even choose which apps will open documents and change the defaults.



- Mac and iPhone apps: One of my favorite Mac apps, Preview, is coming to the iPad! Apple intends it for viewing and editing PDFs, of course, and it will also support image viewing and editing, even with the Apple Pencil. There are plenty of other apps that do this sort of thing, of course, but Preview has been a staple on the Mac for decades, and it will be welcome to have on the iPad. iPadOS 26 will also gain the iPhone's redesigned Phone app and the new Games app, both of which are also coming to the Mac.

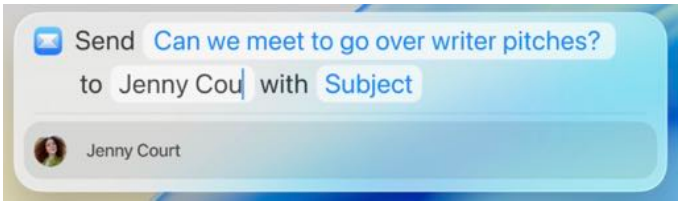
- Background processing: Computationally intensive processes and other activities that take a long time, like exporting edited videos and downloading large files, can now run in the background while you do other things.



Despite the company's protestations to the contrary, many people have worried that Apple wanted to dumb down the Mac experience to make it more like the iPhone and iPad. These changes to iPadOS make it clear that the Mac experience has won. Those who previously preferred a MacBook may look more seriously at the combination of an iPad and keyboard.

Spotlight Shines More Brightly

While the Apple Intelligence-powered version of Siri that is supposed to understand our personal context is still in the future, Apple unveiled a new version of Spotlight that has many of the same capabilities. Thanks to the new App Intents framework that developers can use to expose the capabilities of their apps, Spotlight will enable users to take hundreds of actions in many different apps without lifting their hands from the keyboard. Spotlight will also be able to understand what you're working on and suggest relevant files, apps, or actions. For instance, you'll be able to start a timer, create calendar events, generate a new email message with fields pre-filled, play a podcast episode, and more.



Spotlight also introduces the concept of "quick keys," which are short, custom mnemonics for particular actions. For instance, you might type `sm` to trigger Spotlight to send a message or `ar` to add a reminder.

In addition, Spotlight becomes a clipboard manager, providing access to recently copied items, including text, images, and links. You can browse, search, and insert past clipboard entries directly via Spotlight.

It's also worth noting that this new Spotlight will be available on the iPhone, iPad, and Mac. Given the new Mac-like focus of iPadOS, Spotlight may become an ecosystem-wide way of accessing a vast number of cross-platform capabilities.

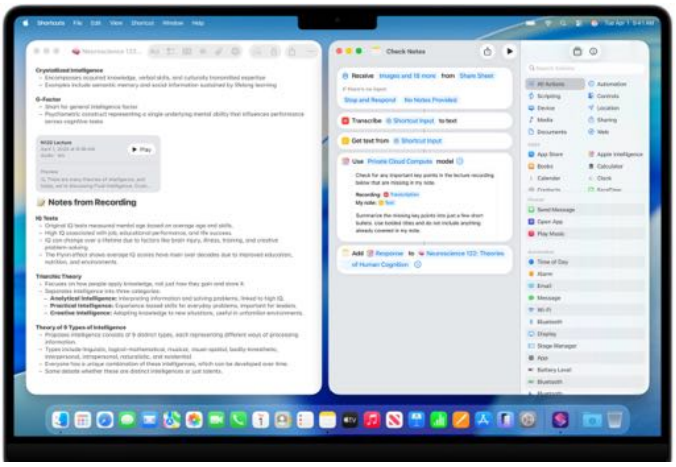
In an interesting historical echo, Apple's previous searching technology, Sherlock, was the impetus for the verb "to Sherlock," meaning to kill third-party apps that provided the same features. (Sherlock killed Karelia's Watson by delivering essentially the same feature set as a built-in feature of Mac OS 8.5 in 1998.) The new Spotlight may Sherlock numerous keyboard-focused launchers and clipboard management utilities—it's going to be a tougher sell for the likes of Alfred, LaunchBar, and Raycast. However, I suspect that they all have enough more capabilities to retain both loyal users and attract new users looking for more than Spotlight can provide.

Apple Intelligence Opens to Users via Shortcuts

As much as I like automation, I'm not a fan of Shortcuts. I find it clumsy, lacking connections to the apps I want to control, and ultimately frustrating. My only use for Shortcuts is Federico Viticci's astonishing Apple Frames shortcut that frames and combines iPhone and Apple Watch screenshots quickly and easily. Even editing it to work the way I want (always saving combined screenshots as JPEGs, for instance, and putting my preferred export option at the top of the list) is an exercise in frustration.

That said, it is exciting that Apple will be providing Shortcuts with direct integration with Apple Intelligence. A new category of intelligent actions powered by Apple's on-device foundation models will enable text summarization, image generation, and text manipulation (including proofreading,

tone adjustment, and more) through Writing Tools. Even more interesting, Shortcuts can call Private Cloud Compute, Apple's online system for more powerful models, or even access ChatGPT.



You'll also be able to run shortcuts automatically on a schedule or when you take specific actions, such as saving a file to a particular folder or connecting to a display. I plan to see if I can create shortcuts to automatically rename all JPEG files saved to my desktop from .JPEG to .JPG, a task I have previously accomplished with Hazel (my only real need for that brilliant little utility). Shortcuts also gains integration with Spotlight, so you can trigger shortcuts via Spotlight's new quick keys and even collect and pass information from Spotlight to the shortcut.

Hold the Phone

Although actual phone calls aren't central to the iPhone anymore, particularly for younger users, Apple has significantly enhanced the Phone app and brought it to both the iPad and the Mac thanks to Continuity.

A new Call Screening feature automatically answers unknown callers without even alerting you to the fact of a call. Once the caller shares their name and the reason for their call, the Phone app rings and gives you information to help you decide if you want to pick up. Live Voicemail, which is triggered with the Voicemail button that appears on the phone screen in iOS 18, has never worked for me, so I'm a little dubious that Call Screening will work as advertised, but I'm happy to give it a try.

The other big feature of the Phone app is Hold Assist, which waits on hold for you and notifies you when someone on the other end picks up and is ready to talk to you. Hold Assist kicks in automatically when it detects hold music and asks if you want it to wait for you. You can continue to use your iPhone or put it away and do other things while you wait. Again, I'll believe this will work once I experience it.

Finally, the Phone app supports Live Translation, Apple's new system-wide feature for real-time translation. It uses on-device models to translate text in both directions, enabling you to talk with someone with whom you don't share a language. Live Translation also provides translated captions in FaceTime and texts in Messages. Developers will be able to access a Live Translation API, so expect to see apps that make it easy to translate back and forth in person.

A Flick of the Wrist

Although the marquee feature of watchOS 26 is the new AI-driven Workout Buddy, which coaches and cajoles you through workouts, I'm reserving judgment on that until it ships. Speaking as someone who coaches runners in real life, parts of the demo made me cringe.

However, the watchOS 26 feature that I'm sure I will use is the new wrist flick to dismiss notifications. There are times when I'm riding my ElliptiGO and would like to check my mileage or time, only to have the Workout app's screen covered by a notification. Being able to dismiss those with a flick of the wrist rather than having to use my other hand would be welcome. The wrist flick gesture is compatible with Apple Watch Series 9 and later, as well as Apple Watch Ultra 2; it is not available on the Apple Watch SE.

By Adam Engst

Switching from a 27-inch iMac to a 14-inch MacBook Pro: A Fresh Start

At long last, I have replaced my 27-inch iMac. I bought the original 2014 27-inch iMac shortly after it was released because it combined impressive power with an astonishingly crisp 5K Retina display for a thoroughly affordable price. When that Mac suffered an SSD failure in early 2020, I limped along with an external boot drive for a few months but replaced the Mac as soon as Apple introduced the 2020 27-inch iMac later that year. Little did I know that would be the last 27-inch iMac model. 2020 was also the year I swapped my 2017 MacBook Air for an M1 MacBook Air shortly after it was released—I had been avoiding the previous models with the infamous butterfly keyboards.

The M1 MacBook Air is still going strong, but the 27-inch iMac has been struggling. Its fans were running more regularly, Photos frequently paused iCloud syncing for the Mac to cool down, some actions were taking longer than they should, and the scroll wheel of my Contour Designs RollerMouse Pro was becoming increasingly flaky. And, of course, it's an Intel-based Mac, so I couldn't test Apple Intelligence on it or use certain apps that require Apple silicon. It was only a matter of time before I would switch my primary Mac to one with Apple silicon, and the time finally arrived.

The Decision Tree Leading to a MacBook Pro

My upgrade decision hinged on three key requirements: support for dual 27-inch displays, compatibility with my standing desk setup, and maintaining my preferred pointing device position. I work at a standing desk that places the keyboard at an ergonomically correct typing height and holds a pair of 27-inch displays approximately 13 inches (33 cm) higher, so they're at the ergonomically correct viewing height for me. To start, whatever Mac I chose had to support two 27-inch displays, and I felt that I had to make that decision first.

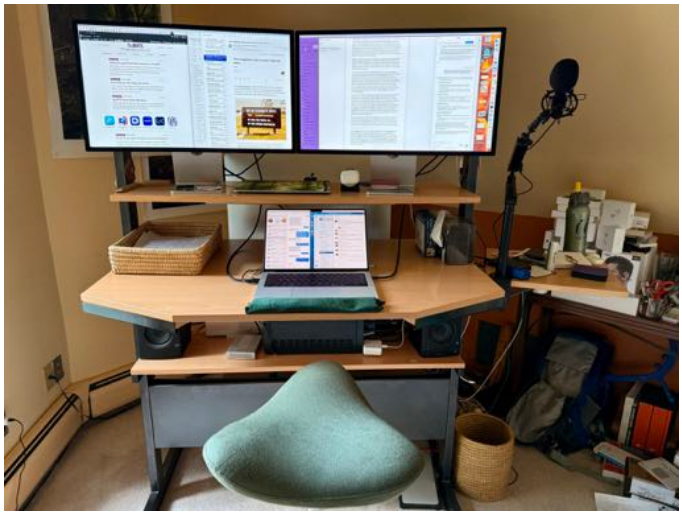
The Apple Studio Display was the obvious choice, but it's expensive and didn't meet the high expectations we had for Apple's consumer-level display when it finally arrived. I flirted with the idea of one of those ultra-wide curved displays, but they lack the pixel density of actual 5K displays, and I've never been able to find a store where I could test one to determine if its display quality met my needs. I also debated whether I should save some money and opt for one of the newer 5K 27-inch displays from Asus or BenQ, but most lacked webcams, and the build quality of the Apple Studio Display was superior, so the lower price wasn't as compelling as it might have been. In the end, I decided it was best to stick with the Apple Studio Displays despite the cost so I would have Apple-native displays that will probably last for at least the next decade (I've used the same 27-inch Thunderbolt Display since 2014, and it still works fine).

Initially, only the higher-end Apple silicon Macs could drive two external displays, but Apple gradually enhanced these capabilities, enabling the M3 MacBook Air to support two external displays with the lid closed and subsequently providing the M4 MacBook Air with sufficient power to manage two external displays in addition to the built-in display. Any one of the M4 MacBook Air, M4 MacBook Pro, and M4 Mac mini would meet my needs. But which to choose?

I've always maintained a strict desktop/laptop split, with powerful desktops for most work and light laptops for travel. That pointed toward the Mac mini, but there was a problem. Because I've used a Contour Designs RollerMouse Pro or a MacBook Air for so many years, I prefer my pointing device to be in front of my keyboard, not off to the side. Although a Mac mini would be cheaper than the other options, I'd need to buy an Apple Magic keyboard (Touch ID was a must-have) and another RollerMouse, which would increase the price by about $500. (I would prefer a trackpad, but it's tricky to get a Magic Trackpad positioned in front of a Magic Keyboard—a custom tray is necessary to get them at the right level.) With the input devices, the M4 Mac mini would cost about $1800 and the M4 Pro version about $2100.

The cost and fuss associated with input devices, combined with the allure of a third screen, were sufficient to push me back to laptops. Although a standard M4 MacBook Air or 14-inch MacBook Pro would provide more than enough power for everything I do today, I decided to future-proof my decision with an M4 Pro 14-inch MacBook Pro configured with 24 GB of memory. It also offers more pixels than even the 15-inch MacBook Air, an SDXC card slot, an HDMI port, and an additional Thunderbolt port with support for Thunderbolt 5. At $2200, it was $600 more than the M4 MacBook Air ($1600) and only $200 more than the equivalent M4 14-inch MacBook Pro ($2000). Since I already have an M1 MacBook Air that I'll probably continue to use for lightweight tasks away from my desk, the extra money seemed worth it for a notably more powerful MacBook Pro.

The final check before ordering the M4 MacBook Pro was to rebuild my IKEA Jerker desk to see if I could get it to provide a larger typing surface. Previously, the shelf under the displays held my keyboard and RollerMouse Pro fine, but lacked space for a laptop with the lid open. By cannibalizing the main surface from Tonya's previous Jerker desk, I was able to give myself plenty of room for the MacBook Pro with the lid open.



When I switched from the 2014 27-inch iMac to the 2020 model, I simply removed the old iMac from my desk and replaced it with the new one, using Migration Assistant to transfer everything. Apart from faster performance, the experience was nearly identical. This move has involved much more adaptation and new ways of working, not least because I decided to do the cleanest of clean installs, transferring data and settings from my old Mac in only a few controlled situations. I wanted to see how I'd do things when given the option to start from scratch. And it proved quite interesting.

A Completely Clean Install

Unlike some, I have no particular complaints with Migration Assistant. However, during an investigation into what was taking up space on my iMac, I discovered that I had significant quantities of data in my user's Library folder that hadn't been modified in over 4 years because it was associated with apps I hadn't used during that time. In `~/Library/Containers` alone, I found nearly 400 old folders that occupied over 2.6 GB of space. Migration Assistant would have blithely transferred all that unnecessary crud along with data and settings I actually care about. And I don't even want to think about the 2400 items occupying nearly 19 GB in my iMac's Downloads folder.

That made me decide to set up the new MacBook Pro fresh. I knew it would take a bit longer because I would have to download and configure apps as I needed them, but it was worth doing to eliminate cruft. The iMac has 170 apps in its Applications folder, but after installing the apps I've needed in the past few weeks, I'm at only 100 on the MacBook Pro. (Lots of those were pre-installed by Apple.) I have reconfigured nearly all of those apps from scratch, although I manually transferred settings or support files for a couple that would have been tedious to set up again, such as Dejal's Simon monitoring tool, which tracks changes on approximately 15 webpages for me.

The only notable hiccup associated with the migration came with a Nisus Writer Pro macro I use to convert a folder of RTF files to DOCX. After the migration, it failed with a completely inscrutable error, even while I could use it on the same data on the iMac with no problems. After a lengthy conversation, ChatGPT made a comment that set me on the right path—I needed to install the Rosetta 2 translation environment, which enables Intel-based apps to run on Macs with Apple silicon. Normally, that happens when you open an Intel-based app on an Apple silicon Mac, but launching the Nisus File Converter utility (buried within the Nisus Writer Pro app package) from a macro didn't trigger macOS to get Rosetta. Once I manually launched Nisus File Converter, macOS downloaded Rosetta, and the macro started working again.

The two configuration tweaks that required a bit more effort were displaying the Library folder in the Finder's Go menu so I didn't have to press Option to see it each time (see "Dealing with Lion's Hidden Library," 20 July 2011) and getting proxy icons to appear all the time (see "TipBITS: Always Show Window Proxy Icons," 26 March 2022)

The remaining question revolves around how to bring over documents and other files in my home folder. For the moment, I've decided to treat such data like settings and bring it over manually as needed. At some point, I'll probably copy the remaining data in each folder in my home folder to the new Mac or archive completely unused folders to an external drive. Additionally, I may keep a duplicate of the iMac's drive around indefinitely, just in case I need to restore something I missed in the more distant future.

Cloud Storage Proves Helpful

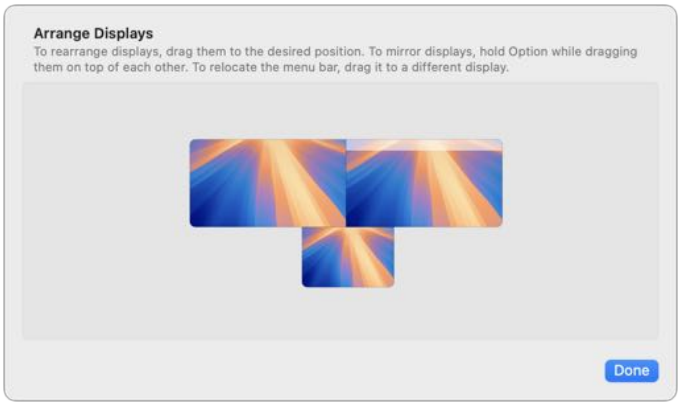
Part of the reason I could get away with not migrating all the data in my home folder is that a significant amount of it came over automatically once I set up iCloud, Google Drive, and Dropbox. I use iCloud Drive's option to sync my Desktop and Documents folders between devices, and Tonya and I share certain personal files in Google Drive and Dropbox, although we're moving away from Dropbox to avoid the additional cost. In particular, I was pleased that I could access my Keyboard Maestro macros and BBEdit text factories instantly, as they sync via Dropbox.

After setting up all the cloud storage services to sync and turning on iCloud Photos, I have so far only needed to bring over one or two folders from the iMac. I was initially surprised by that, but upon reflection, the vast majority of what I do is either entirely online in Web apps like Google Docs and Lex or synced among my Macs by one of the cloud storage services.

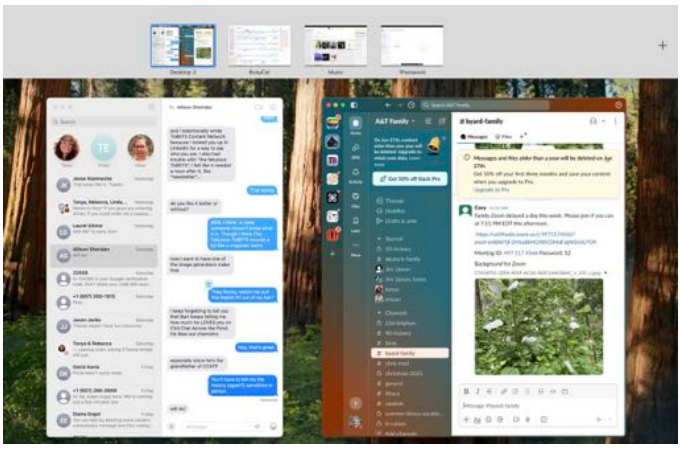
Honestly, I can see why cloud storage is so popular with those who have grown up with constant high-speed Internet and aren't perturbed about storing personal or corporate data on servers outside their control. It's undeniably helpful to be able to access all your data on any device, and it makes spinning up a new device vastly simpler.

A Third Screen for Ambient Apps

Since I have long been accustomed to having two 27-inch displays, I wasn't quite sure how I'd end up using the MacBook Pro's built-in display. It's too low for ergonomic use—I'd end up craning my neck down too much to use it for long. However, I've found it handy for apps that I want running at all times but that occupy my attention for only moments at a time, currently Messages, Slack, Music, BusyCal, and 1Password. I think of them as ambient apps—just as I'd glance at the wall to see the current month's calendar grid, I can switch to and glance at BusyCal with the tap of F5 or a three-fingered swipe.



Previously, I layered these ambient apps under others on my left-hand screen, accessing them with an F-key. There was nothing wrong with that approach, but I'm liking having them in a known space on the MacBook's screen. In fact, while I keep Messages and Slack together, each of the others gets its own space so I can interact with it full-screen.



I have experimented with some different window positions for my main apps on the two Apple Studio Display screens, but having Arc left-justified on the right-hand screen and Mimestream right-justified on the left-hand screen keeps my Web browsing and email front and center. (Refer back to the photo at the top to see that arrangement.)

MacBook Trackpad Requires a Wrist Rest

Part of the reason that Spaces works well for my ambient apps is that I can switch between them fluidly using three-finger swipes on the MacBook Pro's trackpad. I'm familiar with trackpad gestures from previous laptops, but without a trackpad on my iMac, I never quite appreciated how easy they

are to use. It's also nice to have essentially the same keyboard as on my M1 MacBook Air. Previously, I was using a big, clicky Das Keyboard, which was so different from the thin Apple keyboards that my fingers had trouble switching back and forth at times. It will take some time to retrain my muscle memory for the new input devices, but I think it's worthwhile.

The main problem I've encountered with mousing on the MacBook Pro is that its front corner is so sharp that it's actively painful to rest my hands on it. There's nothing new about this—I think every Mac laptop has had too-sharp corners since the polycarbonate white iBook. It's not an issue when typing because my palms naturally come down on the palm rests on either side of the trackpad. But since I primarily use the trackpad with the index finger on my right hand, I have to pull that arm back, causing the right palm to rest on a surface in front of the laptop. When the laptop is in my lap, my thigh provides that surface. I wasn't sure what I'd do when the MacBook Pro was on a standing desk.

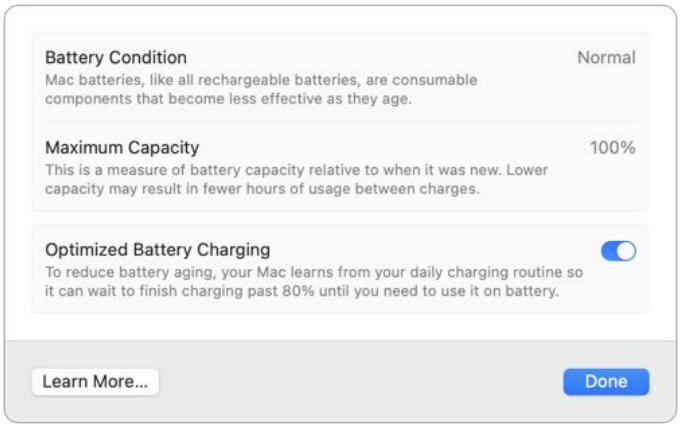
Initially, I tried aligning the front of the MacBook Pro with the edge of the desk surface to encourage myself to hover my palm in the air. I hated that approach instantly. I spend a lot of time reading text with my right hand's fingers on the trackpad to scroll or position the insertion point for editing, and I need somewhere to rest my palm while I'm doing that. I experimented with a few items I had on hand—a square Kensington trackball palm rest and a promotional hand squeezer from Datto that resembles a large Lego block—but ultimately settled on several layers of a bubble mailer encased in some old T-shirt material. (That's the green thing in front of the MacBook Pro in the desk photo above.)

My homemade wrist rest works acceptably, but I don't intend for it to be a long-term solution. Now that I've seen how it works, I can look for a commercial wrist rest in the correct dimensions for my setup.

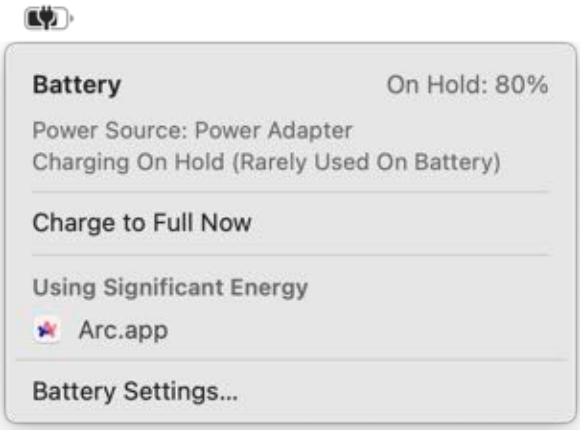
A Laptop That Seldom Sees a Lap

I do feel a little weird working on a MacBook Pro that rarely leaves my desk. In fact, I've disconnected it from the Apple Studio Displays only once, and the immediate complaint from macOS about how I had forgotten to eject my Time Machine backup drive first reminded me that if I were going to do this regularly, I'd need to get a copy of St. Clair Software's Jettison, which simplifies the process of dismounting drives (see "AppBITS: Jettison Solves macOS Disk Ejection Annoyances," 28 May 2025).

The other oddity of treating a laptop like a desktop Mac is that it needs to remain plugged in at all times. I'm using the MagSafe 3 power adapter purely because it shows a green light when the MacBook Pro is 100% charged and an orange one otherwise. Having it at 100% would be ideal only if I were planning to leave on a trip. Otherwise, it's much better to use Apple's Optimized Battery Charging option and let macOS try to keep the battery at 80% most of the time. To find it, open System Settings > Battery and click the ⓘ next to Battery Health.



As has been discussed extensively on TidBITS Talk, optimized battery charging does a fine job of minimizing the impact of keeping a MacBook Pro plugged in all the time. In short, there's no need to be concerned that you're limiting the battery's lifespan.



Apple Studio Displays Are Solid, If Uninspiring

Perhaps I'm jaded from working on 27-inch iMacs with 5K Retina displays for the last 11 years, but the Apple Studio Display just isn't that impressive. It's exactly what I expect to see in terms of size and quality, although I do greatly appreciate the fact that I now have matching displays of equal quality.

Most people probably don't know or care about this, but screenshots reflect the resolution of the display on which they're taken. As a result, if I took a screenshot of a 300-by-200-pixel window on the iMac's screen, it would be 600-by-400 pixels in size. (The same screenshot taken on the non-Retina Thunderbolt Display would be 300-by-200 pixels.) Even if you shrink a screenshot down to its original dimensions, the pixel-doubled version usually looks sharper, and if a TidBITS reader zooms it on our website, it gets bigger. The practical upshot of this is that I no longer have to pay attention to which display contains a window I want to capture.

One benefit of attaching two Apple Studio Displays to my MacBook Pro is that they each provide three additional USB 3.2 ports (10 Gbps), which are sufficient to connect my Time Machine backup drive and the Audio-Technica ATR2100x USB mic I use for podcast appearances, plus another external drive on which I plan to store virtual machines. My two external archive drives aren't currently connected, but since I turn them on only occasionally, it's no hardship to connect them manually. I have a Thunderbolt 3 hub in the closet but haven't seen any benefit to connecting it yet.

The only quirk is that I just remembered that I used to connect my iMac via Ethernet for the ultimate speed and stability, with Wi-Fi as an automatic fallback. I have a two-part dongle (Thunderbolt 2 to Gigabit Ethernet and Thunderbolt 2 to Thunderbolt 3) that can provide wired Ethernet to the MacBook Pro, but it only works when connected to a Thunderbolt port, not to one of the USB 3.2 ports on the Apple Studio Display. Since each Apple Studio Display must be connected to a Thunderbolt port, that leaves only one open for Ethernet, but I'm not sure I want to dedicate it to that purpose forever. Perhaps I'll try that Thunderbolt hub after all.

Finally, both the Apple Studio Displays and the MacBook Pro boast 12-megapixel Center Stage cameras, which are vastly better than the 720p FaceTime HD camera in the Thunderbolt Display and the 1080p FaceTime HD camera in the 27-inch iMac. I haven't had a chance to compare the video quality of the Apple Studio Display with the iPhone 16 Pro's rear camera using Continuity Camera, but I appreciate not having to dedicate my iPhone to the task for video calls.

A Fresh Start Indeed

Moving from my beloved 27-inch iMac and ancient Thunderbolt Display to the 14-inch MacBook Pro with a pair of Apple Studio Displays has been more than just a hardware upgrade—it has been an opportunity to reconsider some long-standing ways of working. Starting fresh without Migration Assistant, although more time-consuming, has helped me create a cleaner, more intentional setup that should reduce quirks for years to come. Even without Migration Assistant, cloud storage significantly reduced the potential headaches of migrating much of my data. The addition of a third screen to hold ambient apps has proven welcome, and although I've liked the MacBook Pro's keyboard and trackpad overall, I'm still addressing some ergonomic challenges of using it on a standing desk. In the end, what's important is that the new MacBook Pro feels fast and fresh while still retaining the most essential aspects of my everyday Mac experience.