

THE ACADEMY OF PLUMBING 7 – GETTING ORGANISED – BACKGROUND

I know. It sounds fabulous, doesn't it? Get Organised and your life will be less stressful, more pleasant, more productive and yielding of leisure time. Bookshops are full of self-help manuals advising us how to Get Organised. I look at them guiltily, berating myself that I'm not More Organised Than I Am and wishing I could be more like these Gods Of Organisation and less like my slovenly self. Does any of this sound familiar? Good, because I wouldn't want anyone to read this article as Matron chastising the ill-disciplined and untidy child. What follows is a bit of background, then practical advice on how to set up and organise your Mac, its data and external storage so that the whole shebang gets in your way less than it does at the moment. Cleanliness Is Next To Godliness can wait for a later article. Probably written in a later life, in my case.

IN THE BEGINNING

Some of you whippersnappers might be too young to remember the 'classic' Mac OSs: those that predated OS X. Lucky you. The Mac first gained its reputation as 'the computer for the rest of us (who could afford it)' because of its initial ease of use compared to other computer operating systems. Now the great thing about 'ease of use' is that it implies a user being able to get productive work done while still being pretty low down the operational learning curve, and indeed the Mac's Graphical User Interface (GUI) allows that. Command Line jockeys of yore with nimble typing fingers and a head full of DOS commands, and latter-day nerds similarly skilled in Unix and Linux, tend to scorn GUIs as the preserve of wooses, claiming their stripped-down command lines enable them to be far more productive than GUI users. At the virtuoso level this may well still be true, but how many of us are? Or indeed wish to be? We're photographers after all.

So, the Mac 'computer for the rest of us' set about challenging the elite nerdocracy with ease of use, fresh ideas and the illusion of freedom: suddenly we were apparently free to name files as we liked, put our data where we wanted, and generally feel to be masters of our domain. The Mac was our servant; we didn't have to comply with DOS's rigid mind-set. Of course, this idea caught on big-time with spontaneous, freedom-loving creative types and the Mac user demographic, as we know it today, was born. OS X isn't like that, and those of you skilled in using the 'classic' Mac OSs were probably miffed at the whole Unix idea of 'security', 'file permissions', 'user folders' and 'root', as I was. What? What do you mean, I don't have permission to do that? You're my computer, dammit. DO AS I SAY! Gradually, though, I gained a little understanding of why OS X makes the insistences it does and came to appreciate the sense in them.

IN THE OTHER BEGINNING

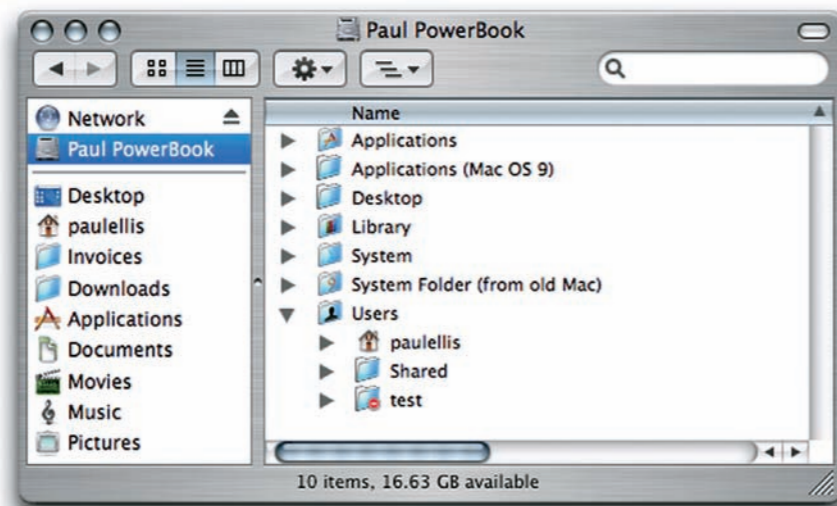
It's well known that OS X is based on Unix, an operating system initially developed in academia over 30 years ago to run large mainframe computer systems. These systems were characterised by comprising big, air-conditioned computer rooms full of processors that were programmed from multiple dumb 'terminals' consisting of a screen and keyboard. People booked 'computer time' on such systems in order to get computing work done. With such a setup, you

can't allow any one user to look at another user's work because that would be a breach of privacy. You also can't allow any one user to take over the whole computer or crash it, because that would be too destructive and disruptive. So, the whole Unix hierarchy of 'root' (the super-user, or the operating system itself) and subservient 'administrator' and 'normal' users each with their own Home folders was conceived of, as were the concepts of 'protected memory' and 'pre-emptive multitasking'. This is a true simultaneous multi-user system from the ground up.

The 'classic' Mac OS was nothing of the sort, and even though some attempts were made to make it into an apparently multi-user system, with security, they didn't go very far because the underlying design didn't allow it. Consequently, users were free to roam with impunity, store their data where they liked, name it as they wished and throw away anything they didn't like the look of, including the operating system. Believe it or not it was perfectly possible to put the System Folder in the trash, empty it, and lobotomise the whole machine in one fell swoop. OS X won't let you do that.

THE OS X NANNY STATE

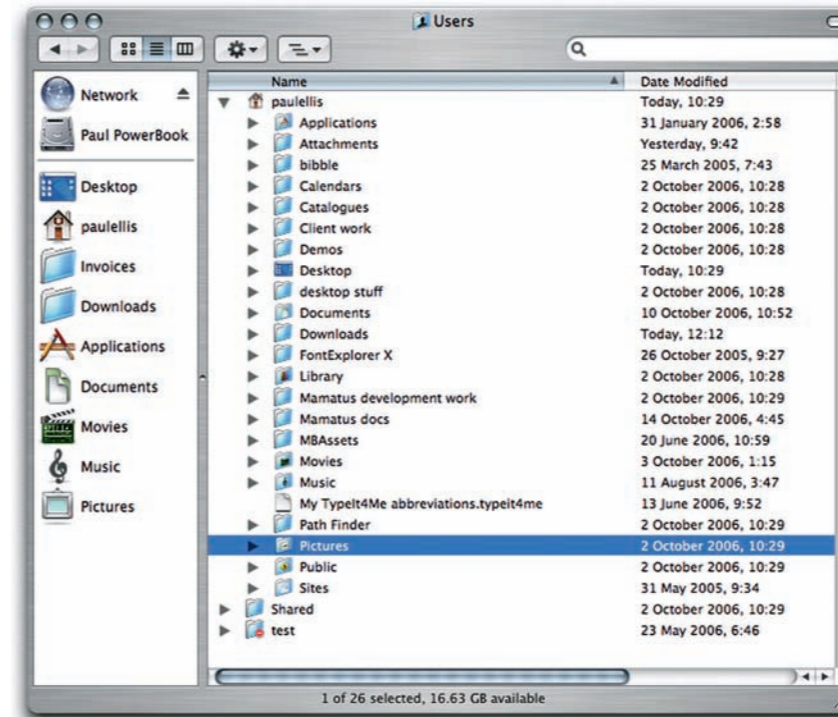
OS X sets out to protect you from yourself, in the nicest possible way. If you double-click on your hard drive icon (which shouldn't be on your desktop, by the way: more later) and look at the window in List View you'll see something similar to the following:



This is called the 'root level' (or topmost level) of your hard drive. Notice the Users folder, in which lurk folders called 'pauelllis' (my Home folder), 'Shared' and 'test'. I'm the current user, so I have permission to look inside my own Home folder. 'Shared' means what it says: a place to store data which is shared by multiple users of this computer. 'test' is another User on this Mac: I don't have permission to look in test's Home folder, hence the no-entry sign on it. Here we see the Unix hierarchy made flesh. Let's look in a User Home Folder (top right picture).

Whoa, loads of stuff in there: in fact, all of my data. None of it is left lying around at the root level of the hard disk, as the 'classic' Mac OS encouraged us to do and, mystifyingly, is still encouraged by Apple placing the hard disk icon on your desktop by default. Because all of my data is in my own Home folder I own it all, I have permission to access it and I can make a simple, complete backup of it just by dragging a copy of my Home folder to another hard disk.

Two folders inside my Home folder are notable: 'Desktop' and 'Library'. (Don't be misled by the Desktop folder at the root level of the hard disk: this is used by Classic and is a hangover from OS 9



days. You won't see this on an Intel Mac.) Desktop here reveals itself for what it is: a special type of always-open folder, the contents of which are permanently visible as the Finder background. Yes, it's a folder and a perfectly reasonable place to leave data, unlike the 'classic' Mac OS in which the desktop was a weird halfway-house displaying files, folders and applications that might well be resident on a number of different connected drives. Any object that appears on your OS X desktop actually exists within your own, User Desktop folder, which is why, when you drag a file from another disk to the desktop, it gets copied there. 'Classic' Mac OS didn't do that: it moved the file's icon there instead. From this of course it follows that each User within OS X should have their own Desktop, and they do, all arranged according to their own preferences.

This brings me neatly on to the contents of the User/Library folder. Dig inside that and, along with loads of other stuff, you'll find a Preferences folder. All of your own user preferences, your application preferences and so on are stored here. It should now be clear that any one User could pretty well customise the Mac exactly as they'd like it without affecting any other User of that computer, because everyone has their own separate set of preferences.

We've now established that your User folder is your own world in which you are free to roam, safe from the predations of other Users and benevolently prevented by OS X from carrying out any action that would cause you to nuke yourself, other Users, or the Mac itself. Oh, that the real world were organised in such a way! So, to keep it that way, I suggest you all open your Finder Preferences and set it up thus (right), as not only will you remove for yourself the temptation to dump stuff directly to the root level of your hard disk, where it doesn't belong, but also cause new Finder windows to open in Column View, the full beauty of which I will reveal next month.

Are you a CORGI photographer, sir? Those of you still hungry for information can keep up by periodically checking my blog at <http://www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk>, where you'll also find my contact details.

The cheapest possible storage

... is bare-naked hard drives. A client revealed this rather fabulous trick to me a few weeks ago – one of those things I should have thought of myself but we can all be a little slow on the uptake sometimes.

This guy buys bare hard drive mechanisms like this <http://tinyurl.com/vqh7f> for £40 a pop and a USB to IDE connector cable like this <http://tinyurl.com/pu8ww> for another £40. He then connects a bare hard drive to his Mac using the connector cable, rests the hard drive on a hollowed-out block of wood to let the air get at it, and backs up his RAW files to it. When it's getting full he makes an iView MediaPro catalogue of its contents, which he stores on the drive and on his internal hard disk. Then he disconnects the drive, puts a sticky label with a name on it, whacks it into a similarly named VHS video box and puts it on a shelf. Job done. This storage works out at about 16p per gigabyte, a price unmatched by even the cheapest DVDs and without the short life and operator overhead they entail. Brilliant. Make a dupe and post it to your pal in Ulan Batur as an offsite backup.

