Chapter 1

Adventuring into the Mac World

*F*orgive me for getting too personal right off the bat, but next to your spouse or significant other, is there anyone or anything you touch more often than a computer keyboard? Or gaze at more intensely than a monitor?

If this is your initial dalliance with a Macintosh, you're probably already smitten — and quite possibly at the start of a lifelong affair.

Despite its good looks, the Mac is much more than a trophy computer. You can admire the machine for flaunting intelligent design, versatility, and toughness. A Mac can take care of itself. As of this writing, the Mac has avoided the scourge of viruses that plague PCs based on Microsoft Windows. Apple's darlings are a lot more stable, too, so they crash and burn less often.

Mac-Spectacular Computing

You shouldn't be alarmed that far fewer people own Macs compared with PCs. That's like saying fewer people drive Ferraris than drive Chevys. Strength in numbers is overrated — and even at that, the trend toward Apple's computers is in plus territory.

Besides, as a new member of the Mac community, consider the company you are about to keep. Mac owners tend to belong to the cool crowd: artists, designers, performers, and (can't resist this one) writers.

Sure, these same people can be smug at times. I've had Mac mavens go ballistic on me for penning *positive* reviews that weren't flattering enough, or for even daring to suggest that Macs aren't always perfect. The machines come pretty darn close, though, so you're in for a treat if you're new to the Mac. It's been suggested that most Windows users go to their computers to complete the task at hand and be done with it. The Mac owner also gets things done, of course. The difference is that using machines branded with the Apple logo tends to be a labor of love. Moreover, with Intel chips inside Macs, Apple's computer can double as a pretty darn effective Windows machine.

As of this writing, Apple was celebrating the Mac's 30th anniversary. There's good reason for the venerable computer's staying power.

Checking out shapes and sizes

Apple has a tremendous advantage over the companies promoting Windows PCs because it's the single entity responsible for producing not only the computer itself, but also the important software that choreographs the way the system behaves. Everything is simpatico.

This situation is in stark contrast to the ways of the PC world. Companies such as Dell and Hewlett-Packard manufacture hardware. Microsoft produces the Windows software that fuels the machines. Sure, these companies maintain close ties, but they just don't share Apple's blood relationships.

You'll find a variety of Macintoshes meant to sit on top of your desk — thus, the term *desktop computer.* These Macs are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. Just know for now that the main examples of the breed are the iMac, the Mac mini, and the Mac Pro.

Mac *laptops,* so named because they rest on your lap and are portable, are the MacBook Pro and the Twiggy-thin MacBook Air. (You remember the svelte 1960s supermodel Twiggy, right?) They're often referred to as *notebook computers* or just plain *notebooks.* Like spiral-bound paper notebooks, they can fit into a briefcase or backpack. These days, MacBook Pros are also anorexic.

Matching a Mac to your needs

Haven't settled on which Mac to buy? This book provides assistance. Cheap advice: If you can eyeball the computers in person, by all means do so. Apple operates more than 400 retail stores worldwide, mostly in North America. You also find retail outlets in the United Kingdom, Italy, China, France, Spain, Germany, Japan, and elsewhere. Trolling through these high-tech candy stores is a delight. Of course, you can also buy Macs on the Internet or in traditional bricks-and-mortar computer and electronics stores.

Just be prepared to part with some loot. Although the gap between the cost of PCs and Macs is narrowing, you typically pay more for a Mac than for a comparable unit on the PC side.

(Uh-oh! The Mac diehards are boiling at that remark. I can practically see their heads exploding as they rant, "There's no such thing as a *comparable* Windows machine.")

Selecting handy peripherals

As you might imagine, a full range of peripherals complement the Mac. Although much of what you create in *bits* and *bytes,* to put it in computer-speak, stays in that electronic form, at some point, you're probably going to want to print your work — on old-fashioned paper, no less. Fortunately, a number of excellent printers work with Macs. I provide details in Chapter 8.

You may also choose a *scanner,* which in some respects is the opposite of a printer. That's because you start with an image already in paper form and then scan it — translate it into a form that your computer can understand and display. Okay, so you can also scan from slides or microfiche, but you get my point.

Some machines combine printing and scanning functions, often with copier and fax capabilities as well. These are called *multifunction,* or *all-in-one,* devices.

Communicating with Your Mac

The Mac isn't at all standoffish, like some human objects of affection. It's friendly and approachable. In the following sections, I tell you how.

It's a GUI

Every mainstream computer in operation today employs what's called a *graphical user interface,* or GUI. The Mac's GUI is arguably the most inviting of all. It consists of colorful objects or pictures on your screen, plus windows and menus (for more, see Chapter 3). You interact with these by using a computer *mouse* or other *pointing device* to tell your machine and its various programs how to behave. The latest Macs also incorporate *multitouch gestures* that control actions on the screen; your fingers glide across a touchpad (on Mac laptops) or the Magic Trackpad accessory that you can purchase to use with a desktop. You can also use gestures on the surface of the Magic Mouse.

Either approach sure beats typing instructions as arcane commands or taking a crash course in programming. For that matter, OS X Mavericks, the operating system that you'll get cozy with throughout this book, lets you use voice commands and dictation as well.

With great tools for you

Given the Mac's versatility, I've often thought it would make a terrific product to peddle on one of those late-night infomercials. "It slices, it dices. Why it even does more than a Ginsu Knife or Popeil Pocket Fisherman!"

Indeed, have you ever paused to consider what a computer is, anyhow? Consider a few of a computer's most primitive (albeit handy) functions. A Mac can

- ✔ Tell time
- ✔ Display family portraits
- ✔ Solve arithmetic problems
- ✔ Play movies
- ✔ Let you chat with friends

I daresay that you didn't surrender a grand or two for a simple clock, photo album, calculator, media player, or telephone, but it's sure nice having all those capabilities in one place. And as that announcer on TV might bark, "That's not all, folks."

I can't possibly rattle off all the nifty things a Mac can do in one section, and new uses are being found every day. (The included iLife and iWork software suites get their own sections later in this chapter, and I encourage you to read the rest of the book.) But whether you bought or intend to buy a Mac for work, play, or more likely some combination of the two, some little birdie tells me that the contents of the Mac's tool chest will surpass your expectations.

And output, too

I'm confident that you'll spend many pleasurable hours in front of your computer. At the end of the day, though, you're going to want to show other people how productive and clever you've been. So whether you produce legal briefs, spiffy newsletters for the PTA, or music CDs for your summer house's beach bash, the Mac will make you proud.

Living the iLife

All the latest Macs are loaded with a terrific suite of software programs called *iLife* to help you master the digital lifestyle you're about to become accustomed to. (On some older systems, you can purchase the upgraded iLife suite of programs.) I dig deeper into the various iLife components throughout Part IV. Here's a sneak preview:

✔ **iTunes:** Apple's popular program for buying and listening to music, and buying or renting movies and TV shows. It's available free on all Macs, and though it's also found on Windows computers, it's technically a member of the iLife family.

✔ **iPhoto:** The great photographer Ansel Adams would have had a field day with iPhoto. This software lets you organize and share your best pictures in myriad ways, including placing them in calendars or in coffee-table books. You can even find pictures by where you took them and who's in them.

✔ **iMovie:** Can an Academy Award be far behind? iMovie is all about applying cinematic effects to turn your video into a piece of high-minded art that would make Martin Scorsese proud. Who knows? Maybe Apple will find work for you at Disney or Pixar.

✔ **GarageBand:** Did somebody mention groupies? GarageBand lets you make music by using virtual software instruments. The latest version also helps you create online radio shows, or *podcasts*.

Working with iWork

Macs of recent vintage also come with iWork software, an application suite that helps you . . . well, get work done. Consider iWork to be Apple's answer to Microsoft's Office productivity suite (versions of which, by the way, also work on the Mac). The Mac iterations of iWork are similar to versions on Apple's iOS 7 devices, most notably the iPad, as well as web-browser based versions for Macs and Windows. Apple's productive trio includes

✔ **Pages:** Are you writing your thesis or the great American novel? Using Apple's polished word processor is a great way to accomplish this gigantic task. You can even save your finished documents as Word files to share with all the folks who still rely on Office.

✔ **Numbers:** Who says a spreadsheet has to be dry, boring, or even just about the numbers? The Numbers spreadsheet program helps you visualize those numbers and make them come alive with predesigned templates and interactive charts.

✔ **Keynote:** Cinematic animations, Apple-designed themes, and engaging charts — such are the tools Apple provides in Keynote to help you create the kind of spiffy and professional presentations that are sure to get your point across.

Reaching Outside the Box

The modern computing experience extends well beyond the inner workings of the physical contraption on your desk. Computing is more about what occurs in the magical kingdom of cyberspace, better known as the Internet.

Getting online

In Chapter 9, you discover all there is to know about finding your way to the Internet and the many paths you can take when you get there. The Mac comes with the software you need to get started (and the circuitry required) to connect online through fast broadband methods.

TECHNICAL STUFF

If you get a hand-me-down Mac, it might still dial up the Internet through a conventional phone line — but by now, you won't be spending much time on such ancient communication methods. Such models are increasingly scarce.

Hanging in the iClouds

So much of what we do on computers nowadays happens online — or, as it's frequently put, *in the cloud.* Apple's online service is appropriately called iCloud. It's a place to manage photos, music, documents, contacts, calendars, and more. It's also a place to keep all this data synchronized, not only across all the Macs you may own, but also across other devices, including Apple's own iPhone smartphone and iPad tablet computer. iCloud is also available for Windows owners. Read Chapter 12 for details on the iCloud service.

Networking with or without wires

Ask a few people to explain what networking is all about, and they'll probably utter something about trying to meet and cozy up to influential people who might help them advance their careers or social lives.

A Mac can help with such things, too, but that's not the kind of networking I have in mind. Computer networks are about having two or more machines communicate with one another. Getting online to connect with various online outposts is a kind of networking (your computer connects with a web host, which is another type of computer, to put it simply). You can also set up a network that enables your Mac to share files, pictures, music, a printer, and more with other Macs or Windows computers in your home.

Even on a Mac, this second type of networking can get kind of geeky, though Apple does as good a job as anyone of helping to simplify the process. You can network by connecting certain cords and cables. The preferred method is to do so without wires. Networking is explained in Chapter 18.

Staying Safe and Trouble-Free

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Mac has historically been able to avoid the nasty viruses and other malevolent programs that give Windows owners the creeps. In the nastiest scenarios, those Windows machines (or certain programs) are shut down, and personal information is surreptitiously lifted. In this day and age, not even Mac owners should let their guard down. (And remember, in some instances, the Mac can double as a Windows machine.) Chapter 13 offers counsel on avoiding online dangers.

No matter how much care and feeding went into producing these beautiful computers, when all is said and done, we're talking about physical contraptions filled with circuits and silicon. Machines break or at the very least get cranky. So drop by Chapter 20, where I outline common troubleshooting steps you can take to ensure that you and your computer develop your relationship gracefully. It's the high-tech alternative to couples counseling.