

MacDirectory

apple deals, apps, news, jobs, reviews, videos: macdirectory.com



\$7.95 USA \$9.95 CAN



WARREN MANSER: TRANSFORMING IDEAS AND IMAGINATION INTO REALITY
MACDIRECTORY'S 2012 IWARDS | BE PART OF SPACE EXPLORATION WITH SKYCUBE
ART SCHOOL GUIDE: FEATURING THE BEST CREATIVE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
PLUS: ADOBE ELEMENTS 11, HOLIDAY BUYERS GUIDE, REVIEWS, APPS AND MORE

THE MACDIRECTORY AWARDS

WORDS BY BILL TROOP

This year we've seen an interesting trend. The most impressive products have come from companies that have been in the game for decades, yet have shown unexpected expertise and imagination recently. They include **Apple, Intel, Olympus, Microsoft, Adobe** and **Norton**.

The MacBook Retina



The **MacBook Retina** is the most advanced personal computer ever made. Its primary innovation is the scaling technology Apple built into the hardware, the operating system, and into apps. On the surface, what Apple did was simple: It merely incorporated a higher-resolution display than had ever been used before in a laptop. Had they stopped there, it would have been impressive enough. But it would have been disappointing too, because such high resolution in a 15-inch form factor would mean that many of the interface elements would be too small to be comfortably visible.

Apple's solution was to perform *differential scaling* on different screen elements. It is extremely complex, requires huge processing power, and can occasionally exact penalties — slow scrolling in web pages, app sluggishness where you don't expect it. But no company in the world even thought of doing these things before Apple. Or had the imagination, capacity, and drive to get a working product out the door.

This is truly the most award-worthy technological achievement of the year, and it will always rank as a high point in computer history. For more detailed information, see Anand Lai Shimpi's article over at anandtech.com. In fact, Anand deserves an award for it, because he's the only technology writer yet who understands what really makes the MacBook Retina tick, and we're delighted to acknowledge the reach of his expertise.

Intel's 520 Series SSDs



This is our third award for an Intel solid state drive. We believe Intel's SSDs are the most valuable hardware component a computer user can own. SSDs have no moving parts, so there is nothing mechanical to go wrong and ruin your data. Last year, we awarded Intel's 510 Series. This year, the **520 Series** brings faster speeds, even greater reliability, more capacity, and lower cost per GB.

Nothing makes your computer work faster than having an SSD. Virtually all disk operations are between 2 and 10 times faster. Boot times and app loads are better than halved. The seconds and minutes you save with an SSD quickly add up to meaningful hours and even days.

And because SSDs are so dependable, we've noticed that we have fewer day-to-day problems on both OS X and Windows 7 when we power either OS with an SSD. That's because long before a mechanical hard drive fails, there are day to day glitches that are fixed on the fly either by the OS or by the hard drive's internal controller. These errors aren't fatal, but they are probably what cause you to have to spend a day here and there reinstalling a driver, a program, or even your entire system. What's priceless about SSDs is that these vexatious glitches just don't seem to happen much anymore.

Intel has been producing solid state storage since the late 1970s and knows more about it than any other technology company. Although it has some worthy competition from Samsung and Micron (steer clear of the other brands), Intel SSDs are widely considered the most reliable. If you care about data integrity, and your time is valuable, you won't regret purchasing an Intel SSD.

Adobe Creative Suite 6



Is it something in the air? The great suites, usually cumbersome, slow, and easy to poke fun at, are growing sleek, while losing none of their power. Last year, we awarded Microsoft for remarkable improvements in Office 2010/2011 on both Mac and PC. This year it's Adobe's turn. We haven't been absolutely mad about an Adobe Creative Suite version since CS3, but 2012's **Creative Suite 6** shows the company in awesome form.

This is the most smoothly executed rendition of a hugely complex suite of programs we've seen yet, and it's equally impressive and virtually identical on both OS X and Windows. Every program has been fine-tuned and honed. Speed and usability have never been so high across the board. Just as with MS Office last year, we were stunned by the responsive feeling each program in the suite displays. Reliability and freedom from bugs are also noticeable. There's never been a release of Creative Suite that gives you such a feeling of confidence in the tools you're working with.

Yes, like everyone, we have a few pet peeves. But we're not going to mention them, because carping pales into insignificance when you experience the overall quality of this release. We think Adobe is responding to users' deepest needs in a way we haven't seen in quite a while, and we hope to see the trend continue. We predict 6 is going to be the most successful release of Creative Suite ever.

Olympus



Four, Olympus. This is the fourth straight year we've awarded an Olympus four thirds system camera. Our conviction that Olympus comfortably leads the compact interchangeable lens camera field was confirmed earlier this year by analyst Jim Fisher over at PC Magazine, whose Imatest results showed that Olympus's new OM-D EM-5 produces measurably better images than Sony's flagship NEX-7. That's in spite of a larger sensor on Sony's system. Yet Sony makes the fabulous sensor that powers the Olympus cameras.

So how does Olympus *still* manage to come out on top? Through its superior lens design and manufacturing. Other OM highlights include what is still, measurably, the world's fastest autofocus system, a boost from 12 megapixels to 16 megapixels, and improved low light performance. We take great pleasure in awarding the OM-D EM-5 this year. In addition to the phenomenally sharp 12-50 lens (24-100 35 mm equivalent) that comes standard with the OM-D, we also had the opportunity to test Olympus's fast 45 mm f/1.8 lens. Like others we were impressed by its speed, sharpness and *bokeh* (the aesthetic quality of out-of-focus areas). Yes, we prefer the convenience of the zoom, but we easily achieved stunning pictures with this lens we couldn't have gotten any other way, as the rose picture on this page shows.



Norton



Norton has been famous for anti-virus since 1991, when Norton/Symantec's first antivirus product came out. The real news has been in the last five or six years, when the company has made a sustained effort to (1) have zero impact on computer performance and (2) stay comfortably ahead of the many competing products on both Mac and PC. Norton has succeeded in realizing both goals. Going into 2013, the Norton

antivirus, 360 and Internet Security products are still tops, but there are several changes to note:

1. Norton One is a moderately priced subscription service that includes Norton's top products and outstanding unlimited 24/7 phone support. Trust us, we've tried it. It's great. Norton One protects up to five devices — any combination of PCs, Macs or Android smartphones and tablets — and includes 25 GB of cloud backup.

2. For 2013, products such as Norton Anti-Virus, Norton Internet Security, and Norton 360, will no longer have version or ‘year’ indicators. You pay for service by the year and your software is continuously, automatically and invisibly updated to the latest version. This has already been working pretty well in the 2012 versions of Internet Security and 360, and for 2013, Norton says that the occasional reboot required will be even less frequent — their goal is once or twice a year. Dispensing with version numbers is a risky gambit and it will be interesting to see how successful it is.

3. Norton One has an extremely effective cloud backup system which we’ve been testing with satisfaction for over a year. It is a substantial improvement on Norton’s original cloud backup service.

We award each of the Norton products but we think Norton One offers the best value of all.

iPhone 5



This year’s iPhone has universally been acclaimed as the best smartphone ever. Five million were sold in its first weekend, setting a new record. JP Morgan predicted that the iPhone 5 could boost US GDP by half a percent. The iPhone is both a technological and an economic phenomenon. And iPhone muggings are up 40 percent in New York City.

That said, we’re worried about two things: the iPhone 5’s susceptibility to scratches, scuffs, dents, and dings — in some cases, right out of the box! And the dismal maps, which the New York Times called “the most embarrassing, least usable piece of software Apple has ever unleashed.”

We don’t want to think we’re witnessing the unmistakable first signs of post-Steve decline. But Apple has got a lot to prove in 2013 — as has, of course, the rest of the PC industry, where innovation has been almost paralyzed by Apple’s stunning performance during *most* of 2012.

Dragon Dictation



Dragon has been famous for a decade for being the first and only usable product that allows you to dictate into a computer. New at press time are **Dragon Naturally Speaking 12** for Windows and **Dragon Dictate 3** for Mac. Both use the same voice recognition technology, which boasts 99 percent accuracy out of the box. Dragon continuously trains itself, so accuracy improves the more you use it.

Both products not only take dictation but let you control your computer by voice. Dragon is incredibly complex, demanding software, and it is not perfect — yet. That will come in future years. Nevertheless, we are compelled to award this product because — for those who need it or prefer it — it is life-enhancing technology that is immeasurably superior to any competing product. And it truly does get better every year. There are substantial improvements in the latest versions. Most important is greater accuracy. For the Mac, voice recorder support tops our list; for Windows, we like enhanced Gmail (and Hotmail) support, and — only in Dragon Premium, not Home — the ability to use multiple audio devices. On both platforms we’re delighted with the support for wireless Bluetooth headsets.

Mac or Windows? The quality of recognition is the same, but the Windows version is more mature, less buggy, and has more features. If dictation and voice control are crucial to you, the simple truth is that for now (we hate to say this — ouch!), you are better off with the Windows version. That said, the Mac version is rich enough to satisfy the majority of Mac users. On the Mac, Mountain Lion has good voice recognition built in, but it can only work with a fast Internet connection at all times, and in other respects does not match Dragon’s power and flexibility. For example, Dragon lets you control your Mac by voice; Mountain Lion doesn’t.

Looking forward, we suspect that Dragon’s support for wireless Bluetooth headsets could be more important than it seems at first. Because it means *we no longer have to sit down* when we’re working at the computer. Countless studies tell us what we already know: that sitting down in front of a screen is bad for our health. Combine Dragon and a wireless headset and you’re no longer tethered. You can walk around the room while you tell your computer what to do; you can even do exercise or yoga. This has the potential to be a major, life-changing paradigm.

G-Technology



G-Tech is the Rolls-Royce of external hard drives — as anyone in Hollywood will tell you. And the data Hollywood trusts to G-Tech drives is more valuable per byte than any other. G-Tech drives are fast, reliable, stylish, and very solidly built. G-Tech is also a cautious company. It was slower than we would have liked to embrace USB 3 and Thunderbolt throughout its lines. But the company would doubtless respond that it waited until the new interfaces were fault-free enough for the G-Tech community, which prizes absolute reliability before all else.

This year we award the **G-Tech Slim**, which offers 500 GB and is bus-powered so there is no need for an external power supply. Interface is USB 3/2 for maximum speed and flexibility. It's Mac-formatted and Time Machine ready, and can be reformatted for Windows. We do not think lack of Thunderbolt is a minus on this model, because every Thunderbolt-supplied computer also has USB3 and because Thunderbolt would not offer a speed advantage on any single drive now made. Also, dare we say, USB 3 might actually be more reliable at present? If you need G-Tech reliability and G-Tech style in the smallest possible package, this is your choice. And from the Apple Store, it's only \$79.95. You can't get such high-level creds for less.

OWC and Newer Technology

OWC has been doing great work year after year, providing reliable and economical products that are primarily marketed towards Mac customers, though nearly all of them work equally well with PCs. Among the award-worthy standouts are several products from the **Newer Technology** brand that OWC is primary distributor for.



The **Newer Tech Voyager Q** is a Quad-Interface SATA hard drive docking station. It boasts on the package that it is "The Easiest Way to Access Data from ANY 2.5" or 3.5" Serial ATA (SATA) Hard Drive Up To 3.0 TB" — and this is true. No screws,

no headaches. You take the bare drive, slip it into the slot, attach it to your system, and when you're done, you press the button

which safely and conveniently ejects the drive from the connector so you can easily lift it out of the dock without damage. The Quad interface is state of the art, including USB 3, eSATA, Firewire 400 and Firewire 800. You really have to see it to understand both how simple it is to use and how non-threatening. We can't understand why nobody has thought up such a great product before.



Even more versatile, though not quite as elegant, is **Newer Tech's SuperSpeed USB 3.0 Universal Drive Adapter**. This connects *any* 2.5", 3.5" or 5.25" drive to any computer, Mac or PC, that has a USB 2 or USB 3 port. *Any* drive means

any SATA drive, or the older IDE drives many of us still have important archives on. It includes any kind of optical drive or burner you might have as well. We've called this product the Swiss Army Knife of connectivity, and it's a tool no computer user should be without. For only \$29.99 from OWC, it's probably the best money you can spend on your digital life. We awarded it last year, and as it's a product we never stop using, we're awarding it this year too.



A product we awarded several years ago, Newer's **miniStack**, now merits a new award in its much-developed latest incarnation. The miniStack is designed to be an additional drive enclosure specifically for the Mac Mini, but it

makes a stylish enclosure for any computer, Mac or PC. As is typical of Newer Technology products, it contains as many interfaces as possible.

The miniStack includes USB 2/3, Firewire 400/800, and eSata. You can buy it either with a hard drive of your chosen capacity, or without a drive, to use with a drive you already own. When you buy it bare, it's one of those products that really is remarkably easy to assemble yourself, even if you are uncomfortable with a screwdriver. The new miniStack also has a superior fan to the one in the original model—in fact it's the same kind Apple uses in the Mac mini. Good as that is, by the time you read this OWC will probably be shipping the miniStack MAX, which will include in addition to the hard drive, a full-feature CD/DVD drive. Now that's exactly what so many of us need, when many computers are dropping optical drives.

OWC has been doing a great job for several years providing Mac and PC customers with products and upgrades they actually need. We think of OWC products as having a well-judged balance of innovation, reliability, style, and value. This is a company we admire.

Part II

As happened last year, there were too many exceptional products to include this month. So tune in to Part II in our next issue for more award-worthy technology.

What's at risk if bad power damages your business network?



APC
Legendary
Reliability™

Only APC Back-UPS delivers unsurpassed power protection *and* real energy savings.

Today's cost-saving Back-UPS

For years you've relied on APC Back-UPS™ to protect your business from expensive downtime caused by power problems. Today, the reinvented Back-UPS does even more. Its highly efficient design noticeably reduces energy use, so you start saving money the minute you plug it in. Only APC Back-UPS guarantees to keep your electronics up and your energy use down!

Unique energy-efficient features

Power-saving outlets automatically shut off power to unused devices when your computer and peripherals are turned off or on standby. Automatic voltage regulation (AVR) adjusts the undervoltages and overvoltages without using the battery. With our patent-pending AVR bypass, the transformer kicks in only when needed and automatically deactivates when power is stable. Plus, the APC highly efficient designs reduce power consumption when power is good and extend runtimes when the lights go out. Together, these power-saving features eliminate wasteful electricity drains, saving you about \$40 - \$50 a year. And managing today's Back-UPS couldn't be easier thanks to an integrated LCD that provides diagnostic information at your fingertips.

Trusted insurance for all your business needs

The award-winning Back-UPS provides reliable power protection for a range of applications: from desktops and notebook computers to wired and wireless networks to external storage. The reinvented APC Back-UPS is the trusted insurance you need to stay up and running and reliably protected from both unpredictable power and energy waste!

APC power protection products are available at:



OfficeMax™



Office DEPOT™

that was easy.



Enter to win one of seven Back-UPS BR 700G units (a \$130 value)!

Visit www.apc.com/promo Key Code **m925v** • Call 888-289-APCC x8392 • Fax 401-788-2797

Keep your electronics up and your energy use down!

Back-UPS models are available with the features and runtime capacity that best suit your application, and many models have been designed with power-saving features to reduce costs.

The high-performance Back-UPS Pro Series

High-performance Back-UPS Pro units deliver cost-cutting, energy-efficient features. Power-saving outlets automatically shut off power to unused devices when your computer and peripherals are turned off or on standby, eliminating costly electricity drains. (BR700G shown above)

The energy-efficient ES 750G

The ES 750G boasts innovative power-saving outlets, which automatically shut off power to controlled outlets when the computer plugged into the host outlet is deemed asleep, eliminating wasteful electricity drains.

- 10 outlets
- 450 watts/750 VA
- 70 minutes maximum runtime
- Coax and telephone/network protection



The best-value ES 550G

The ES 550 uses an ultra-efficient design that consumes less power during normal operation than any other battery backup in its class, saving you money on your electricity bill.

- 8 outlets
- 330 watts/550 VA
- 43 minutes maximum runtime
- Telephone protection



APC™

by Schneider Electric