Give Clock a Face-Lift

by Kris Fong
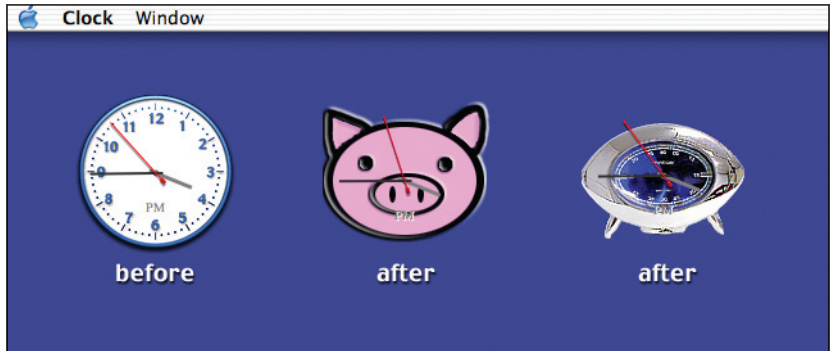
TRICKY

WHAT YOU NEED
- Mac OS X
- An image editor that supports layers and transparency, such as Photoshop ($609, www.adobe.com)

After a Clock-versus-Photoshop face-off, our formerly plain-Jane Clock now has more faces than Michael Jackson.

Like the nubby beige sweater our endearing Grandma knitted for us, our Clock app hasn't made much of a public appearance. Why? Personally, we think it looks rather mundane—schoolmarmish and boring. With all of Apple's cool eye-candy widgets, you'd think the company could have come up with something a little more, well, interesting. Besides, we get the time from our faithful, ever-present menu-bar clock, which has been serving its purpose admirably for years.

Then again, what's the fun in that? We Mac addicts empty the Trash from customized dog-dish and toilet-bowl icons. We remove brushed metal from our window interfaces. We hijack the Poof (see "Hijack the Poof," Mar/03, p71). Why settle for the defaults when you can easily turn Apple's Clock app into something more visually appealing and have a fun toy to kick around on your desktop or anchor in the Dock? For all you modern-day Gepettos, here's how to give Clock a face-lift.

1 Grab the Graphic
Clock has two different displays—a round analog face with hands (which we show you how to alter), and a square digital readout with the date. Both faces are actually 128-by-128-pixel TIFF images. In the Applications folder, Control-click the Clock icon and select Show Package Contents from the contextual menu. In the resulting window, open the Contents folder, and then the Resources folder. The analog graphic is Clock02.tif; the digital graphic is background.tif. Select Clock02.tif, make a duplicate (Command-D) to preserve the original, and then open the copy in Photoshop (or a comparable app).
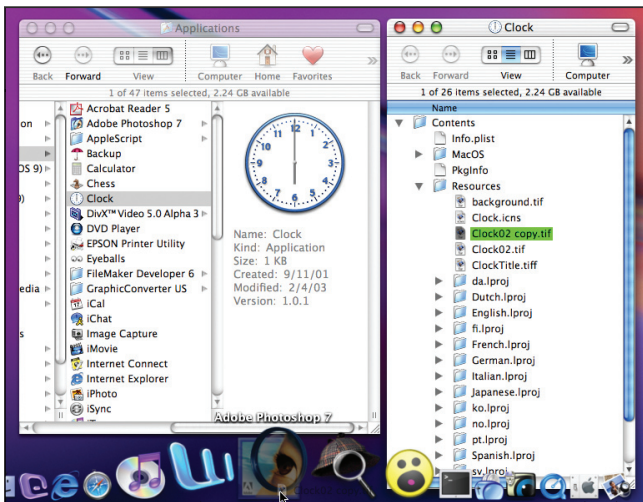
**Make a duplicate to preserve the original face graphic (if you wish), and then open the file in an image editor.**

2 Put On a Happier Face
The analog face is a simple numbered circle against a transparent background. From the Layer menu, select New, then Layer, and click OK in the resulting dialog to create a new layer for designing a new graphic. You can use the old face as a template for a new one, or freeform-design your own face within the 128-pixel square boundary. Or you can size down a masked-out photo and paste it into a new layer as shown below. Keep in mind that the hour and minute hands (anchored in the center) are dark gray and the second hand is red—don't use these colors excessively in your creation, or you'll end up camouflaging the hands. If you're rolling your own design, skip to step 5 when you're finished. To see how we created our piggy, follow the next two steps.
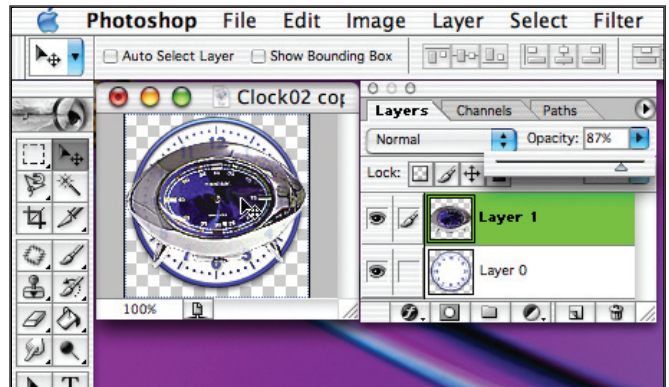
You can quickly change the face by pasting in a photo and positioning it with the original so that the hands align properly in the final product.

3 Pen the Pig

To create our hog's head, magnify the canvas to 300 percent and select the new layer (the one you created in step 2) in the Layers palette. Select black as the foreground color, then use the elliptical marquee tool to draw a horizontal oval that spans the full width of the canvas. Select the paint-bucket tool and click the oval to color it black. Then draw a slightly smaller oval and use the arrow keys to center it over the black oval. Select pink as the foreground color and click the second oval with the paint-bucket tool to color it pink. In the same manner, draw two successively smaller ovals—the larger one colored black and the smaller one pink—to form the snout.

Copy our pig graphic by simply drawing a series of black and pink ovals and circles with the elliptical marquee tool.
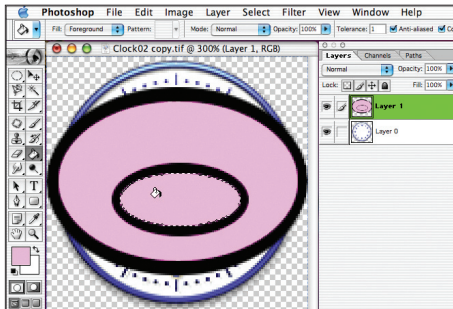
4 Make a Face

Draw a small, vertical black oval for the left nostril, then copy it, paste the copy into a new layer, and move it to where the right nostril should be. Create a small black circle for the left eye, copy it in a new layer, and move the copy to form the right eye. Merge the top two layers down to Layer 1 by selecting Layer 3 in the Layers palette, clicking the top right triangle in the palette to open the menu, and selecting Merge Down. Repeat with Layer 2. Then select black as the foreground color, select the brush tool, select 5 from the Brush drop-down menu, and draw two ears. Switch back to the pink color, select the paint bucket tool, and click each ear to color it pink.

Use the brush tool to freeform-draw the ears, and then dump in the pink color via the paint bucket.
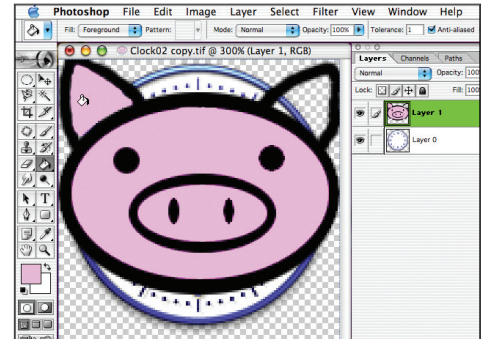
5 Save Face

Once you've finished your graphic, you need to eliminate the original clock-face layer but preserve the transparency before you save it. Bring the canvas size back down to 100 percent. In the Layers palette, select the original clock layer (Layer 0), click the disclosure triangle at the top right of the palette, and select Delete Layer from the drop-down menu. A dialog pops open, asking if you really want to delete the layer—click Yes. Then save the file.
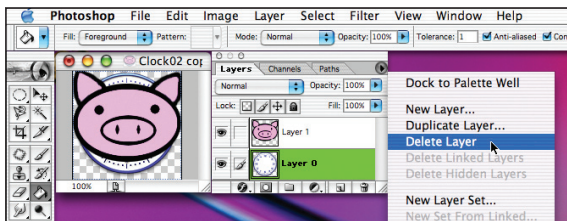
To get rid of the original clock face, simply delete its layer.

6 Pull the Switcheroo

To put your new design to use, go back to the Clock (package contents) window (if you closed it, Control-click the Clock app and select Show Package Contents from the contextual menu to reopen it). Your new design should be in the Resources folder under the name Clock02 copy.tif, unless you renamed the file and saved it elsewhere. Select Clock02.tif (the original design), and rename the file ClockOriginal.tif or the like to preserve it. Then select your new face and rename the file Clock02.tif. Make sure this file resides in the Resources folder if it isn't there already. Then close the Clock window (which hides the package contents), fire up the Clock app, select Analog from the Preferences, and watch time tick away.

Rename your new clock graphic as Clock02.tif to have Clock use your own design as its face.

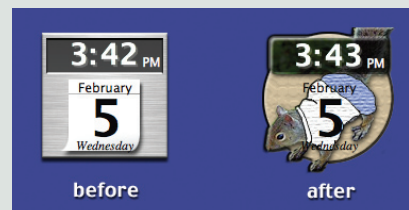> Kris Fong claims that while no pigs were harmed during this face-lift process, they sure are delicious.
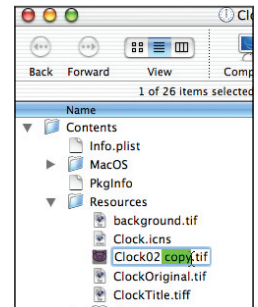
DESIGNING THE DIGITAL DISPLAY

Clock's digital display (background.tif in the Resources folder) requires a bit more futzing, due to the strict placement of the clock readout and the calendar date sheet. If you want to adorn the digital display with your own creation, here are a few things to consider when designing this face.

Designing the digital display is trickier. We gave our squirrel some new duds to keep the date visible.

before   after

Keep the Time Backdrop Dark Clock's time readout is displayed in white characters over the face graphic. Choose darker colors and stick with less-busy graphics when designing the background area to ensure that you can still read the time.

Keep the Date Sheet Light The month, date, and day of the week are displayed in black text. Stick with lighter colors in this area

and avoid placing anything graphical behind the month and day-of-the-week text to ensure legibility.

Lower Opacity to Maintain Alignment To make sure the time and calendar displays align with the new graphic, lower the latter's opacity in the Layers palette so you can see the original face through your new one.