Pimp Out Your G5

by Niko Coucouvanis

TRICKY

WHAT YOU NEED

- Power Mac G5
- Any variety of LED and/or cold cathode light kits, available at Crazy PC (www.crazypc.com) and PCToys (www.pctoys.com)
- Adhesive-backed Velcro or double-sided tape
- Toggle or rocker switches, available at RadioShack (www.radioshack.com)
- Electric drill
- Protective eyewear (not your Gucci pimp shades)

Modders. You've seen them: PC-using wannabes who cut holes in their cases and jazz the whole thing up with flashing lights and fancy paint jobs. Suckers. The Power Mac G5 is the Mack Daddy of pimp cases—not only does it already come with thousands of precut holes in its casing, you can remove its aluminum siding to reveal a clear airflow guard that perfectly showcases your Mac's phat, aesthetically minimalist chassis.

So why not up the bling-bling factor if you're going to put it on display like that? We show you how to light up your G5 like a three-ring freak circus. And because some discretion goes hand in hand with pimpdom, we show you how to wire up a secret control panel of switches that'll let you control the mood lighting—or kill it if you really need to chill. Just decide on your course of design and action—we pimped our G5 out with cold cathode lights and an LED, and included a sound-activated module to make the lights react to sound. It's all good as long as you don't mess with the airflow guard—or the playa.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK MADEO

Turn your Power Mac G5 into a Mac Daddy.

1 **Punk the Power** Got lights? Get power. Unfortunately, the G5 has only one standard 4-pin power plug (unlike the average PC, which usually houses a good half-dozen power connectors and miles of ribbon cable), and it's connected to the SuperDrive. Luckily, our light kits feature dual plugs to share the wattage. To get to the plug, power down your G5, pop it open, and carefully disconnect the SuperDrive's data cable from the motherboard: You'll find it directly under the 'Drive's support frame against the motherboard. Re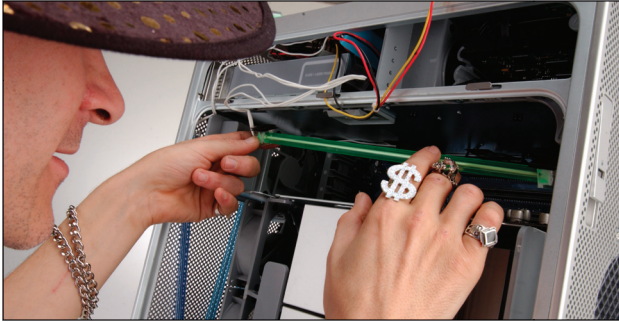move the SuperDrive by pulling the two latch levers beneath it toward you until you feel them release, and pull out the 'Drive—be sure to guide the data cable up through the frame in the process. Then unplug the power cable from the 'Drive's back.

To get to the power plug, pull out the SuperDrive and take a look at its backside.

2 **Bring on the Bling** Now it's time to light this mutha up like a punkass pinball machine—fo' sure. We reformed bar rats and Vegas-ites can't get enough neon, but traditional neon lighting is too hot, power-hungry, and oversized for these purposes. Instead, use cold cathode lights, which consume minimal power (about 2 to 4 watts per light), run cool, and look hot. We like PCToys and Crazy PC light kits, which have smart dual inverters that let you daisy chain lights to a single power source. To power a light, simply hook up the male plug on its power inverter to the G5's power plug and its female end to the SuperDrive— that's it. If you want to add another, disconnect the first light's female plug from the SuperDrive and attach it to the second light's male plug. Then attach the second light's female plug into the SuperDrive. Repeat for any additional lights. If you want to make your lights active, plug in a sound-activated module between your G5 and the first light.

Power inverters—the holy grail of case modding—allow you to bling it on and on and on.

Be smart about your light placement—sticking stuff to the motherboard or to RAM chips is a pretty dim idea.

3 Stick It

Once you've got your chain-o'-lights connected, lock the SuperDrive back in place, pulling the data cable back through the frame and plugging it back into the motherboard. Then carefully pack the power inverters and wires into the space above and/or behind the SuperDrive—watch that fan! Now it's time to decorate. Use adhesive-backed Velcro or double-sided tape to attach your various lights to your G5's interior. We attached our 12-inch cold cathodes vertically behind the case's front panel and horizontally above the PCI cards, with a shorter 4-inch one at the case's front top. We also placed one LED cannon behind the fan, aimed toward the front, to play up the industrial look. Just make sure you leave room for the airflow guard, which will occupy some of the case's free space once you close it up.
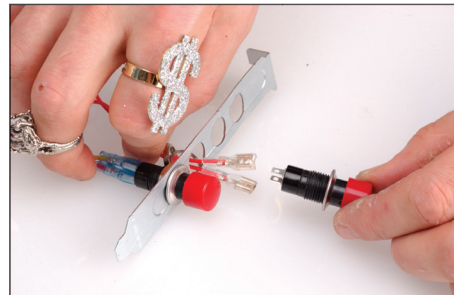
4 Control the Freak

To control the light show, install a set of switches to an empty PCI slot cover on the G5's booty. If possible, use the top one for better wire access. Because our light kits' switches were too wide for the cover, we replaced them with smaller ones from RadioShack (four or five small switches fit on one PCI slot cover). To ensure that you get the right switches, pull off the two lead wires from an original switch and take the switch and a PCI cover to RadioShack to find suitable replacements with the same wire connector (they've got plenty to choose from). Once you've got new switches, slip on your protective eyewear, clamp the PCI slot cover to a block of wood or a drill press (if you have one), grab an electric drill with the same diameter drill bit as your new switches (we used a 5/16-inch bit), and drill one hole for each switch you want to mount.

If you've got a drill in your hands, wear eye protection—especially when drilling metal.

5 Wire It and Light It Up

Route your lights' original switches to the PCI card opening, and neatly tape their wires to your G5's corners and beneath the long case divider under the drive cages. Stick to the frame—don't attach anything to the motherboard, RAM, video card, or other sensitive electronics. Next, unplug one of the original switches from its wire pair and guide the wires through one of the slot cover holes; repeat with all others. Plug each wire pair into a new switch's terminals and mount the switches on the slot cover. Then reinstall the slot cover, lock it down with the safety screw, stick the airflow guard back on, power your beast up, and pimp out to your new light show. Feel free to add other design accoutrements as you see fit—we even replaced our aluminum siding with MacSkinz's clear acrylic G5 side-panel replacement ($40, www.macskinz.com).

These toggle switches have integrated lock nuts, so mounting them is a snap.

Pimpin' with Old School Macs

Now don't feel like we ain't representin' you OG (old G3 and G4) pimps out there. It may be tougher to see lights through opaque Mac cases, but where there's a will, there's a way.

Blunt Me Install a functional cigar lighter into the extra 5 1/4–inch drive bay up front—PCToys sells one for $19.95.

Take It Outside With enough Velcro and tape, you can stick lights anywhere. Route the wires through an empty PCI slot and do your Mac up like a Christmas tree.

Flaunt What You've Got Shine internal lights through your case's back vent holes and its CD- and Zip-drive openings up front. If you've got a Mirrored Drive Door G4, shine light out from its front portholes for a cool effect.

Go Nuts It's your Mac (and your warranty—or not); if you're a real freak, grab a bit and drill some ventilation into the case to let interior lights shine out.

Niko Coucouvanis is investigating miniature hydraulic risers to turn his G5 into a low rider worthy of his pimpin' Oakland neighborhood.