

consistently useful. It serves as a friendly interface for the novice, and simultaneously manages not to be too rudimentary for the power user. What's best, it takes up almost no disk space (550 kilobytes, including 370K of context-sensitive on-line help), uses virtually no memory, and is fully documented in well under one hundred pages. Designed with "the way people think" in mind, *Rooms* is an interesting compromise between the often-difficult world that inveterate *Windows* users have grown accustomed to and a more object-oriented environment less likely to cause the kind of fit that relegates many people's copies of *Windows* to a shelf.

To our surprise, *Rooms* is not intended as a replacement shell for Program Manager. In fact, the documentation clearly notes that *Windows*' anemic home base is intended as the underlying layer for *Rooms* to build upon. You can use *Rooms* itself as your shell, but with no file or disk management tools built in, you probably won't want to. *Rooms* should simply be run as an application under *Windows*, where it treats your *Windows* setup with the utmost respect. Neither installation nor use of the product makes any changes to your system files, and when resident, *Rooms* uses almost no memory or free system resources. We were surprised, then, to find the default "suite" of rooms including size parameters for both Program Manager and *Windows*' Clock. This is unavoidable, as *Rooms* does so for everything you run under it—including DOS programs—but it can be disconcerting to find carefully-arranged programs altered even a little.

Anything you load under *Windows* before starting *Rooms* is available in every room in the suite, and in the Overlay room that is a mandatory part of each group. The status of each such window is updated to reflect its shared status, but if you start multiple iterations of programs that support instancing as windows in different rooms, they operate independently. The shared resource area neatly skirts issues like *Windows 3.1*'s CLOCK.EXE allowing only one copy of itself to be loaded. *Rooms* can contain buttons for launching applications on an as-needed basis as well as predefined windows, which relieves the problems that too many open applications at once can cause in *Windows*.

Navigating *Rooms* is very much like walking around in a building. There's a mechanism built in that lets you see the view from individual windows without entering the rooms in which they reside, but to actually open them you must first step inside. You always have instant access to the overview, plus whatever room you entered your current chamber from, though a "back door". The back door includes a menu that lets you navigate to anywhere quickly, either by room name or a "find" command that points directly to individual windows (see figure). *Rooms*' possibilities are limited only by your organizational preferences.

Rooms has a couple of minor annoyances. For example, door icons tend to fight for space with icons for programs launched in the overlay room, and if you enter a room from the overview, the hallway is assigned two doors, since both "most recent room" and its more specialized purpose point to it. Also, manually changing the background colors for individual rooms is accomplished through *Windows*' Control Panel, which alters not only the room, but your main *Windows* desktop, too.

We're glad to know that Xerox hasn't shuttered the facilities that made Macintosh, *Windows*, X, and other GUIs possible. *Rooms* is a great tool from both usability and evolutionary vantage points, and a confident step in the right direction for anyone thinking about shuttering their *Windows*.

3400 Hillview Avenue
P.O. Box 10034
Palo Alto CA 94303-0816
800-626-6775
\$99

Power Launcher 2.0
hDC Computer Corporation

In March, we reviewed the first release of hDC's *Power Launcher*, and approved of it unconditionally for any user considering himself a candidate for the mantle of "power user". hDC wasted no time getting version two out the door, and although the upgrade is as much a matter of taste as anything else, we're comfortable extending the endorsement. *Power Launcher* will run *Windows* the way **you** think it ought to.

We call the difference between versions one and two a matter of taste because the collection of tools that hDC has dubbed its PowerApps—Power Keyboard, Power Mouse, and Power Toolbox—are as they were. In fact, *Power Launcher* is similar enough in its latest incarnation to the preceding version that