A little more class for VB4

FIRST LOOK

Step Up VB4. *ClassAssist lets you program in Visual Basic using inheritance and classes, with a boost from the ClassExplorer add-in.*

ClassAssist from Sheridan is the collective name given to three separate but tightly integrated products. ClassAssist simultaneously gives VB4 a higher level of object-oriented programming with true inheritance, and low-level control with pedal-to-the-metal access to the Windows API, including control subclassing and message handling. The ClassExplorer add-in does a pretty good job of faking inheritance in class modules by replacing the VB editor with an intensely visual class browser. A set of "Visual Base Classes" are OLE controls that replace the standard combo box, text box, list box, and command button controls. What makes them special is that you can create descendant classes by using ClassExplorer and pure Visual Basic code. And the unfortunately named WinAPI Oblets are a thrillingly conceived example of the new breed of OLE Automation in-proc servers used to provide Visual Basic easy and complete access to the Win32 API.

ClassExplorer seemed the most promising, yet turned out to be my least favorite part of the product. The good part is that it

lets you create rudimentary but useful classes with inheritance in Visual Basic. It even has a sort of primitive constructor/destructor convention. Behind the scenes ClassAssist peppers your source code with dozens of extra comments that ClassExplorer preprocesses; anyone familiar with development using Visual C++ will be used to the concept. This is done at the price of replacing VB4's nice syntax-directed editor with a drab edit control. If you decide not to use ClassAssist or give your code to someone who doesn't use it, things get a bit gamely, because scores of internal directives ClassExplorer embeds in the comments seem suddenly to pop out of nowhere.

The exciting part of ClassExplorer is Visual Base Classes, the set of OCXs I listed previously. Users have craved inheritance with OCXs for some time, and the Visual Base Classes give it to them. Using ClassExplorer, you can create what act like true descendants of these controls. The bummer is that it works only

Tom Campbell has been published widely writing about Visual Basic, Visual C++, and Borland Delphi. CompuServe: 75530,3607.
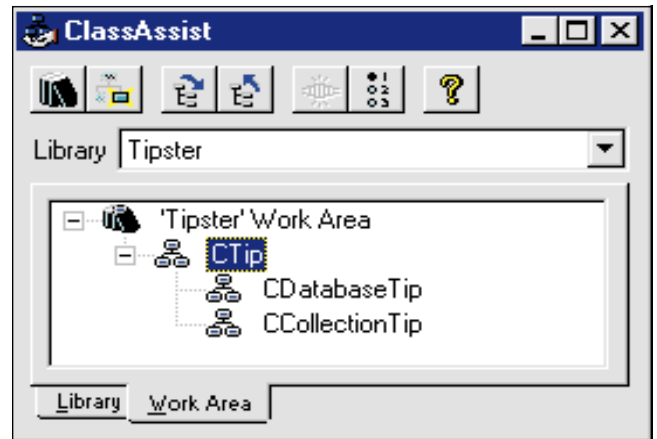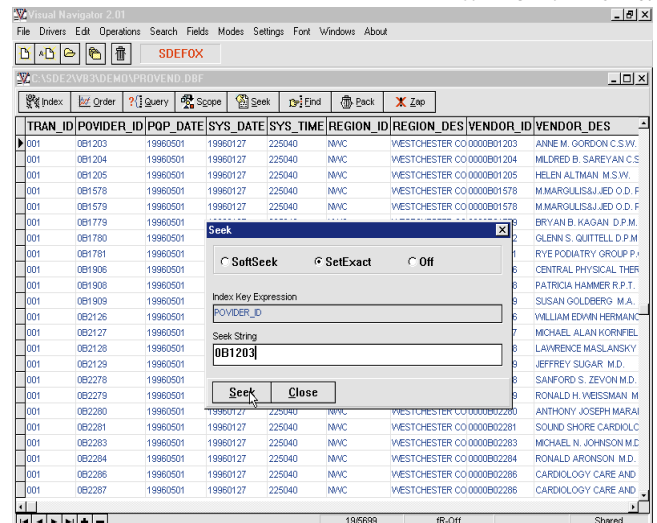

XBase back-end alternative to Jet

FIRST LOOK

SDE2 utilizes variable-length text fields to reduce database size. SDE2 also supports storage of binary large objects (BLOBS).

SDE2 is supplied with two VBX custom controls for Visual Basic. SDEBROW.VBX is a data-bound browse control that allows for grid-like display of data from DBF files. Using SDEBROW, you can display, filter, sort, and search data quickly and efficiently. SDEBROW also supports column freezing in grid mode

Ever since the arrival of Visual Basic 3.0, VB programmers have had access to databases through the data control using Microsoft's Jet Database Engine. However, the Jet Database Engine system DLLs that need to be distributed add a whopping 1 megabyte or more of excess baggage to your application. SuccessWare International, a long-time player in the XBase world, now provides you with the SuccessWare Database Engine, a powerful and compact database back-end alternative to Microsoft's Jet Engine.

SuccessWare Database Engine Version 2.0 (SDE2) is a collection of Windows DLLs and VBXs that provide database access and management for Visual Basic, Visual C/C++, and Delphi programmers using an XBase back-end database.

The core SDE2 database engine allows you to access and manipulate table, memo, and index files used by CA-Clipper, Microsoft's FoxPro, and SuccessWare's own HiPer-Six databases. All these database formats use the DBF file format popularized first by Borland's dBase program. In addition to being able to read these formats, SDE2 provides for enhanced date and numeric fields, and the ability to store and manipulate graphic files within memo fields.

SDE2 Visual Navigator. *Use this tool to access and manipulate XBase back-end databases manually. Your application can manipulate data in the same way using SDE Version 2.0.*

Rama Ramachandran is the coauthor of Que's Visual Basic 4 Expert Solutions *and VBPJ's* Guide to VB4. *CompuServe: 73313,3030.*

A little more class…

with these special Visual Base Classes and not with other OCXs. For example, if you wanted a descendant of the Rich Text control you'd be hosed, and Sheridan has not disclosed its guidelines for creating Visual Base Classes.

ClassAssist
Sheridan Software Systems Inc.
35 Pinelawn Road, Ste. 206E
Melville, NY 11747
800-823-4732
516-753-0985
Fax: 516-753-3661
Price: $249
Availability: now
Quick Fact: This set of VB4 add-ins gives rudimentary general classes and inheritance, low-level Windows API control, and visual inheritance to a set of proprietary OCXs.

The documentation in my preview copy was only about two-thirds complete but already ranks among the best I've seen for a development tool. I felt it hit exactly the right note for the experienced VB programmer, dishing up reminders and inside dirt where the VB documentation falls short, yet avoiding repetition with the VB manuals. There are full tutorials for each part of the product, and what I saw of the reference was also quite well done.

ClassAssist is an exciting product. I feel its Visual Base Classes are limited but will be fabulously useful if you need inheritance for the classes Sheridan created. The Oblets are the most creative way I've seen for programmers to hack the API without using C. ClassExplorer didn't float my boat, but it works as advertised. All in all, ClassAssist is a strong product for serious programmers. ⊠

XBase back-end alternative…

and allows editing of data directly on the grid.

The other VBX control, SDEDATA.VBX, is a collection of a data aware text box, check box, combo box, and list box. By assigning

SuccessWare Database Engine, Version 2
SuccessWare International
27349 Jefferson Ave.
Temecula, CA 92590
Voice: 909-699-9657
Fax: 909-695-5679
CompuServe: GO SWARE
Tech Support: 909-699-9657
Price: $299
Availability: 16-bit version: now; 32-bit version: end of March 1996
Quick Facts: A powerful and compact XBase database back-end for VB that can replace Microsoft's Jet Database Engine in VB3 applications that use XBase back ends.

a field name and a work area containing your open database, these controls reflect the data contained in the current record of the database.

SDE2's main attractions are that it is fast and compact. In my unofficial trials, SDE2 performed 20 to 25 percent faster than the Jet engine while handling queries for a specific record. However, SDE2 really shined on table seeks, performing 500 to 700 percent faster than Microsoft's Jet Engine. And SDE2 weighs in at 300 to 400 KB of files you need to distribute with your application, as compared to over 1 MB of files if you use the Jet database engine.

SDE2 claims to be a "fully relational database management system," but it requires you to set up the relationship using code each time you use multiple tables. Relationships are not stored or enforced in the database. SDE2 comes with Visual Navigator, a visual tool to view and manipulate DBF databases, though it would benefit from having a visual front end for building queries using drag-and-drop as Microsoft Access does. ⊠