TAKE CONTROL OF
BIG SUR

by JOE KISSELL
$14.99

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# Table of Contents

Read Me First ........................................................................................................ 4
  Updates and More ...................................................................................... 4
  What’s New in Version 1.1 ...................................................................... 5

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 6

Big Sur Quick Start .......................................................................................... 8

Take In the Scenic View .................................................................................. 10
  Find Out What’s New in Big Sur ................................................................. 10
  Catch Up with macOS Changes ................................................................. 13

Check Your Mac for Compatibility ................................................................ 18
  Model Support ............................................................................................ 18
  RAM ............................................................................................................ 20
  Free Disk Space .......................................................................................... 21

Upgrade to Big Sur ............................................................................................ 22
  Update Your Third-Party Software ............................................................. 22
  Back Up Your Disk ..................................................................................... 24
  Decide on an Installation Method ............................................................... 31
  Make Final Preparations ............................................................................. 35
  Upgrade Using Plan A: In-Place Upgrade ............................................... 38
  Upgrade Using Plan B: Clean Install ......................................................... 44
  Perform Post-Installation Tasks ................................................................. 54
  Troubleshoot Upgrade Problems .............................................................. 61

A Quick Tour of Big Sur .................................................................................... 65
  Get Your Visual Bearings ......................................................................... 65
  Explore System Preferences Changes ....................................................... 72
  Update Your Backup Strategy ................................................................... 78
  Prepare for Apple Silicon ............................................................................ 81

Work with Control Center ................................................................................ 86
  Use Control Center ..................................................................................... 86
  Customize Control Center .......................................................................... 89
  Manage Menu Items .................................................................................... 89

Click here to buy the full 141-page “Take Control of Big Sur” for only $14.99!
Find Your Way Around Maps .................................................. 91
   Get to Know the Sidebar .......................................................... 91
   Use Guides .............................................................................. 92
   Look Around ........................................................................... 94
   Indoor Maps .......................................................................... 96
   Live ETA Updates .................................................................... 97
   Cycling Routes ......................................................................... 97
   Learn About Other New Maps Features .................................. 98

Enhance Your Messages ......................................................... 100
   Notice the Small Improvements ............................................. 100
   Use the App Store Menu ...................................................... 101
   Improve Group Conversations ............................................... 102
   Use Memoji ........................................................................... 103

Manage Notifications .............................................................. 107
   Display Notification Center ................................................ 107
   Edit Notification Center Widgets ...................................... 109

Improve Your Photos ............................................................. 111
   Navigate Your Collection ....................................................... 111
   Enhance Photos and Videos .................................................. 111

Learn New Safari Tricks ......................................................... 115
   Customize Your Start Page .................................................. 115
   Get More Out of Tabs ............................................................ 118
   Translate Pages from Other Languages .................................. 120
   Extend Safari ......................................................................... 121
   Protect Your Privacy .............................................................. 122
   Import Data from Chrome ..................................................... 126

Discover All the Little Things .................................................. 127
   Other System Improvements ................................................ 127
   Other App Improvements ..................................................... 131

About This Book ..................................................................... 138
   Ebook Extras ................................................................. 138
   About the Author and Publisher ......................................... 139

Also by Joe Kissell .................................................................. 140

Copyright and Fine Print ....................................................... 141

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Welcome to *Take Control of Big Sur*, version 1.1, published in November 2020 by alt concepts inc. This book was written by Joe Kissell and edited by Kelly Turner.

This book teaches you all about macOS 11 Big Sur, including how to upgrade from an older operating system, how to navigate the revised user interface, and how to use the major new features.

If you want to share this ebook with a friend, we ask that you do so as you would with a physical book: “lend” it for a quick look, but ask your friend to buy a copy for careful reading or reference. Discounted classroom and user group copies are available.

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**Updates and More**

You can access extras related to this ebook on the web (use the link in *Ebook Extras*, near the end; it’s available only to purchasers). On the ebook’s Take Control Extras page, you can:

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If you bought this ebook from the Take Control website, it has been added to your account, where you can download it in other formats and access any future updates.
What’s New in Version 1.1

Version 1.1 updates this book to cover macOS 11.0.1, including details about changes between the beta versions of Big Sur and the initial public release version. Most notably:

- **Free Disk Space** now reflects the latest guidance from Apple.
- **Obtain the Installer** has a direct link to Big Sur in the Mac App Store, and more detailed download instructions.
- In **Make a Bootable Big Sur Installer Volume**, I mention the demise of DiskMaker X.
- I’ve updated **Bootable Duplicates in Big Sur** to reflect the fact that macOS 11.0.1 has restored the capability to make bootable duplicates.
In September 2000, just over 20 years ago as I write this, Apple released the first public beta of Mac OS X, which represented a complete rethinking of its previous operating system; version 10.0 Cheetah shipped the following year. Throughout 15 major revisions and multiple name changes (from Mac OS X to OS X to macOS, and from big cats to California landmarks), one thing has stayed the same: the number 10.

macOS Big Sur finally bumps the version number up to 11 (insert obligatory Spinal Tap joke here), and marks that transition with dramatic changes in look and feel. Those changes extend all the way to the underlying design of Big Sur, which supports both Intel-based Macs and the newer Mac models powered by Apple silicon—ARM processors like the ones we’ve been using in iPhones, iPads, Apple Watches, Apple TVs, and HomePods for years. These chips enable faster, more power-efficient, and (in some cases) even less-expensive Macs. And Big Sur helps make that possible.

Apart from the visual changes, the new system architecture, and an impressive list of new features, Big Sur accelerates the process of borrowing elements from iOS and iPadOS. Apple continues to insist that there are no plans to merge macOS and iOS/iPadOS, and that the Mac will always be an independent product. But let’s just say that if Apple were planning a touch-screen Mac, Big Sur would be a much better fit for that product than Catalina is.

This book is your handy guide to what’s new in Big Sur—and how to get it up and running on your Mac. I assume you have a basic grasp of Mac fundamentals already, so I don’t explain things like what the Finder is, how to use the Dock, or where to find your apps. The focus here is on what’s different from Catalina (and other recent versions of macOS).

I also incorporate an abbreviated version of the upgrading instructions I’ve been developing for the past 17 years, ever since Take Control of
*Upgrading to Panther* in 2003. This time around, rather than put that material in a separate book, I’ve condensed that material into a single, extra-long chapter here (see *Upgrade to Big Sur*).

I wrote the first version of this book while Big Sur was still in beta testing, updated it during later beta versions, and made some final tweaks as soon as Big Sur was released. Nevertheless, it’s possible that I’ve missed something, or that Apple will make significant changes to Big Sur after its initial public release that affect the instructions here. If necessary, I may revise this book to address such changes. To check for news or updates to this book, click the link in *Ebook Extras*.

**Note:** Surprisingly, the initial public release version of Big Sur on November 12, 2020 was 11.0.1—not 11.0. This is a good thing, as version 11.0.1 incorporates bug fixes that would otherwise prevent backup apps from creating bootable duplicates.
You can read this book in any order, jumping to whatever topics interest you most. However, I recommend reading the first couple of chapters (Take In the Scenic View and A Quick Tour of Big Sur) first to get an overview, and if you’re upgrading to Big Sur from an earlier version of macOS, you’ll have to go through the upgrading chapters before you can make use of the new operating system.

**Learn about what’s new:**
- Discover what you have to look forward to when you upgrade to Big Sur, as well as what features were added (and removed) in the last several upgrades. Read Take In the Scenic View.
- Take a more detailed look at the new features and interface in A Quick Tour of Big Sur.

**Upgrade your Mac to Big Sur:**
- Make sure your computer can run Big Sur. See Check Your Mac for Compatibility.
- If you’re upgrading from the Big Sur beta, read the sidebar Upgrading from the Big Sur Beta.
- Follow detailed, step-by-step instructions to upgrade your Mac. See Upgrade to Big Sur.

**Dive in to the major new features:**
- Change system settings quickly. See Work with Control Center.
- Get directions and information about potential travel destinations. See Find Your Way Around Maps.
- Have more fun (and be more productive) when chatting with your friends. See Enhance Your Messages.
- Work with notifications from macOS and apps, and customize Notification Center widgets. See Manage Notifications.

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• Use new and updated tools in the Photos app to make your photos and videos better. See Improve Your Photos.

• Enhance your privacy and customize your browsing experience. See Learn New Safari Tricks.

• Uncover smaller, miscellaneous changes in both system-wide technologies and specific apps. See Discover All the Little Things.
Take In the Scenic View

Since you’ve bought this book, I assume you’ve already decided to upgrade to Big Sur and don’t need convincing that it’s worth your time and effort. However, I would like to call attention to some of the biggest changes in Big Sur that you can look forward to, especially those I discuss in more detail later in this book.

In addition, if you’re upgrading from an operating system older than macOS 10.15 Catalina, you may be interested to know what other features were added along the way—as well as some that were removed.

Find Out What’s New in Big Sur

Apple has a list of new Big Sur features on this webpage. I won’t catalog them all here, but I’d like to list some of the most notable changes and improvements since 10.15 Catalina:

- **New look and feel:** The windows have rounder corners. All the icons have been redesigned. Sidebars in the Finder and various other Apple apps are taller and restyled. The toolbar at the top of Finder windows also looks quite a bit different. Menu bar items are more widely spaced. The Dock is no longer *docked* but rather a floating strip, and sheets no longer slide down from the tops of windows but rather float in front. System sounds have been re-worked. And Apple has (unfortunately, in my view) gone even further with making onscreen elements translucent.

  In short, love it or hate it, Big Sur takes macOS in a much different visual (and audible) direction than its predecessors. I show some examples of new interface elements in Get Your Visual Bearings.

- **Control Center:** Much like Control Center on iOS and iPadOS, Big Sur’s new, customizable Control Center lets you quickly adjust system settings. Read more about it in Work with Control Center.
• **Maps:** The Maps app offers enhanced features for cyclists and owners of electric vehicles, guides to local businesses, and even indoor maps of airports and shopping centers. See [Find Your Way Around Maps](#).

• **Messages:** The Messages app, likewise, gains a long list of new features, some of which will be familiar to iPhone and iPad users. Among other things, it now supports pinned conversations, has better searching, enables mentions directed at a particular person within a group chat and inline replies, and features fancy visual effects as well as a new Memoji editor. Read more about it in [Enhance Your Messages](#).

• **Notification Center:** Notifications are now more powerful and more customizable than ever. Notification Center also now supports third-party widgets. See [Manage Notifications](#).

• **Photos:** The updated Photos app has improved editing tools for both photos and videos. It also features better navigation, a new captioning capability, and an improved Memories feature. See [Improve Your Photos](#) to learn more.

• **Safari:** Apple’s much-loved web browser got a big makeover, with a customizable start page, better tabs, automatic translation, privacy improvements, and more. I discuss all this further in [Learn New Safari Tricks](#).

• **System-level improvements:** A number of technologies in Big Sur that we commonly think of as system components rather than conventional apps have undergone minor improvements. That list includes AirPods support, Family Sharing, Siri, and Spotlight. In addition, there are new international features. See [Other System Improvements](#).

• **Other apps:** Smaller but certainly welcome changes have also appeared in numerous built-in apps, including Apple Arcade, App Store, FaceTime, Home, Music, Notes, Podcasts, Reminders, Voice Memos, and Weather. See [Other App Improvements](#).
Check Your Mac for Compatibility

All currently shipping Macs, as well as most models introduced within the past seven years or so, can run Big Sur. Sadly, Big Sur does drop support for some Mac models that were able to run 10.15 Catalina.

The next few pages will help you verify that your hardware is fully compatible with Big Sur.

Model Support

Big Sur does not support Mac models introduced before mid-2013. Macs that can run Big Sur include the following:

- iMac (2014 or newer)

  **Note:** See the sidebar The 3 TB iMac Boot Camp Problem for an odd exception to iMac support.

- iMac Pro (2017 or newer)
- MacBook (Early 2015 or newer)
- MacBook Air (Mid 2013 or newer)
- MacBook Pro (Late 2013 or newer)
- Mac mini (2014 or newer)
- Mac Pro (Late 2013 or newer)

Unfortunately, that excludes the following models that were able to run Catalina, but can go no further:

- iMac (Late 2012, Early 2013, Late 2013)
- MacBook Air (Mid 2012)
• MacBook Pro (Mid 2012, Late 2012, Early 2013)
• Mac mini (Late 2012)

Of course, that list is helpful only if you know which model of Mac you have! This is easy to check: choose Apple  > About This Mac (and, if present, click More Info). You’ll see something like Figure 1; the Overview pane spells out your Mac’s model using Apple’s current terminology. Compare that to the list above and you’re done.

![Figure 1: This window gives you the exact marketing name of your Mac model.](image)

If your Mac isn’t in the list above, then regardless of its age or speed, I’m very sorry to say that it won’t run Big Sur.

New Macs that ship after Big Sur is released will have Big Sur preinstalled; if necessary, you can use the Migration Assistant to transfer files, accounts, and settings from your old Mac, as I explain in my TidBITS article How to Migrate to a New Mac (which is still largely accurate even though it was published in 2016). After your migration, you’ll have some additional steps to complete, as Adam Engst explains in Moving to a New Mac: What’s Left to Do After Migration?

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Upgrade to Big Sur

In previous years, I wrote an entire book on the process of upgrading to the latest Mac operating system. This time around, rather than offering a separate *Take Control of Upgrading to Big Sur* book, I’ve condensed all my upgrading instructions into just this one (admittedly rather long) chapter. Although I’ve deliberately left out some details and background information from the book-length text, what follows should be more than enough to get you through the process.

If you’ve already upgraded to Big Sur, you can skip ahead to *A Quick Tour of Big Sur*.

Update Your Third-Party Software

Every major upgrade to the Mac operating system results in software compatibility problems, where some apps work poorly or won’t launch. Most of us will have to update at least a few apps to make them work correctly under Big Sur. If history is any indication, some incompatible apps won’t be updated right away, and a few might never be. But many developers work hard to ensure that their software is ready for each new version of macOS, and “Big Sur-compatible” software updates have already been appearing for months.

**Tip:** RoaringApps maintains a wiki listing thousands of Mac and iOS apps and the current status of their compatibility with various operating system versions, as reported by users. Although this list is neither exhaustive nor definitive, it provides a quick way to check on the apps most important to you.

Check for 32-Bit Apps

Like Catalina before it, Big Sur requires 64-bit apps; older, 32-bit apps simply won’t run. As a user, you don’t need to know or care about the technical details differentiating 32-bit apps from 64-bit apps. What is
relevant, however, is that if you’re upgrading from Mojave or earlier, there’s a good chance that one or more apps you use regularly won’t work under Big Sur, and some of them may never work on any future version of macOS.

Thus, before you upgrade from Mojave or earlier to Big Sur, you should find out which of your apps are still 32-bit apps and then, depending on what you learn, decide on appropriate steps. The easiest way to do so is to download the free Go64 app. Open the app and click OK. After a few seconds, it lists all your 32-bit apps (including those, marked with an alert icon, which contain one or more 32-bit components), along with helpful information like the date you last used each one and a link to each developer.

Once you’ve identified which apps won’t run under Big Sur, you’ll have to upgrade them to newer versions, replace them with comparable 64-bit apps, or remove them and simply do without them. (If you’re so inclined, you could put Big Sur on a separate volume, or use a virtual machine in an app like Parallels Desktop or VMware Fusion to run your previous version of macOS alongside Big Sur, but you shouldn’t think of these options as long-term solutions.)

**Update Your Remaining Apps**

The Big Sur installer looks for, and disables, certain types of incompatible software—but there’s no guarantee it will find everything (and I should note that it does not remove any remaining 32-bit apps—they’ll still be present, they just won’t work). Given the choice, you’re usually better off upgrading third-party software before you install a new version of your operating system.

Apple built an update mechanism into the App Store, so any apps you downloaded from the App Store can also be updated there—and App Store updates are free. To check for and apply App Store updates:

1. Open the App Store app by choosing Apple > App Store. (In Mavericks or earlier, choose Apple > Software Update.)
2. Click Updates on the toolbar to display a list of available updates.

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A Quick Tour of Big Sur

In later chapters I cover specific apps that have had significant changes, such as Maps and Safari, as well as new system-wide technologies like Control Center. Before we get to those details, though, let’s look around and get acquainted with the new environment.

Get Your Visual Bearings

When you start using Big Sur, you may feel a little disoriented because virtually every element on screen is at least a little different from what you’re accustomed to—and a few things may be downright confusing. So let’s take a moment to review some of the major visual differences compared to Catalina and help you get your bearings.

The Menu Bar

Starting at the top of the screen, we have the familiar Mac menu bar. It’s now even more translucent than before, letting your background image show through, with text that changes in shade depending on the color behind it. The menus themselves are also more translucent. (If you dislike this effect, see the sidebar Turn Off the Translucency.)

As always, the Apple 🍎 menu is on the left, followed by other menus such as File, Edit, and View. Individual items on each menu are now more widely spaced, as are the icons for menu extras on the right.

Apple-provided menu extras such as the clock, Wi-Fi 📡, Spotlight 🔍, and Time Machine ⌘ (each of which can be enabled or disabled on the appropriate pane of System Preferences) are still there. You’ll also see new icons for Battery 🌞 (on laptops only; see Explore System Preferences Changes) and the new Control Center 🏢, which gives you quick access to system settings (see Work with Control Center).

Not all menus are strictly vertical lists anymore! For example, the Wi-Fi menu has an on-off switch at the top, and the Fast User Switching

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menu may have multiple users listed in a single row. To the left of Apple’s menu extras you may see icons for third-party menu extras from apps you’ve added yourself.

**Turn Off the Translucency**

Apple seems to feel that the most important part of my computing experience is being able to see my entire desktop picture, and that any actual controls are mere obstacles. I cannot overstate how strongly I disagree with this position. The controls on my screen—things like the Dock, menus, and sidebars—are the tools that enable me to do my work, and making them harder to read by reducing the contrast dramatically and cluttering them with blurred views of whatever is behind them is completely unhelpful.

Fortunately, there’s an easy way to minimize this effect. Go to System Preferences > Accessibility > Display and select “Reduce transparency.” This makes your Dock, your menu bar, the menus themselves (including Dock menus), and window sidebars opaque. **Figure 10** shows an example.

![Figure 10: Left: a menu with default transparency; right: the same menu with reduced transparency.](image)

If you’re all about style and trendiness and don’t mind the reduction in usability, by all means, enjoy your translucent controls. But if you want to be kind to your eyes and your brain, turn them off! (Most of the screenshots in this book were taken with transparency reduced, for better legibility.)
Work with Control Center

If you have an iPhone or iPad, you’re already familiar with Control Center there: swipe down from the upper-right corner of your device’s screen to get quick access to common settings and controls—without having to dig around in Settings or open any apps. Big Sur’s new Control Center is the same concept, but on your Mac.

Use Control Center

To display Control Center on your Mac, click the new Control Center icon on your menu bar. A panel overlay (Figure 21) appears.

Figure 21: Control Center in its default appearance.
Here, you can do three types of activities:

- **Manipulate a control directly:** If you want to turn something on or off, click the round toggle button next to the label. For example, click the moon button to enable Do Not Disturb. You can also drag the Display or Sound slider to change brightness or volume levels, and use the icons on the Music tile to control playback in the Music app.

- **Display controls:** Some Control Center tiles, such as Keyboard Brightness and Screen Mirroring, have no visible controls, but if you click the tile, a separate control panel appears. For example, on a laptop, click Keyboard Brightness to display a panel (Figure 22) with an on/off switch for keyboard backlighting as well as a Keyboard Brightness slider and a link to open the Keyboard pane of System Preferences.

![Figure 22: Clicking the Keyboard Brightness tile brings up a display with the relevant controls.](image)

- **Display expanded controls:** Even when a tile has a visible control in Control Center, you can click any part of the tile besides that control to display an expanded set of controls in that category. For example, if you click anywhere on the Do Not Disturb tile other than the moon button, you see a new display (Figure 23) with options for how long Do Not Disturb should be enabled, as well as a link to the Notifications pane of System Preferences.
Find Your Way Around Maps

Regardless of platform, the Maps app regularly adds new and more detailed maps for locations around the world. With Big Sur, Maps also gains several new general-purpose features, as well as a few that are currently either available in, or applicable to, only limited geographical areas.

Get to Know the Sidebar

The Maps app has a new sidebar (Figure 24), which you can show or hide by clicking the sidebar icon on the toolbar.

Figure 24: The new Maps sidebar shows favorites, guides, and recent locations.

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The top portion of the sidebar shows your favorites, which include by default your home and work addresses (if they exist on your Me card in Contacts). To add another location to the Favorites list, select it on the map and click Add to Favorites at the bottom of the popover that appears.

Under Favorites is a heading called My Guides, which (theoretically, at least) shows saved lists of interesting places in a particular category (see “Use Guides,” next). Next is a list of recently viewed locations. (In some cases, the single most recently viewed item also appears at the top of the sidebar.) To delete an item from the sidebar, right-click (or Control-click) it and choose Delete from the contextual menu.

Use Guides

In Maps, a guide is essentially a virtual portion of a guidebook—that is, a professionally researched list of places in a given category (sushi restaurants, hiking trails, or historic buildings, say), complete with photos, descriptions, and all the details you need to plan a visit. It’s a way to get useful travel planning information right from within Maps rather than having to do web searches and buy books.

That sounds great, but Apple’s announcement of this feature included only a handful of major cities (San Francisco, New York, London, and Los Angeles); more will be added over time. Limited availability is a common theme in new Maps-related features, as you’ll see throughout this chapter. For now, it’s potentially useful if you happen to be visiting one of those places. However, you can also make your own guide—of a sort—and share it with your friends and family.

View or Save a Guide

To see a guide, simply search for a location that offers guides. For example, type San Francisco in the search field in Maps and press Return. In the popover that appears next to the location’s pin (Figure 25), a selection of guides—if any exist—shows up under a “Place Name Guides” heading. Click See More for the full list. (Currently, San
Enhance Your Messages

Apple’s Messages app brings in some features that were previously present only in the iOS/iPadOS version of the app, and adds some new ones (which are also shared across platforms). Here’s a quick overview of what’s new.

Notice the Small Improvements

There are several small but interesting changes that are worth pointing out even though there’s not much to say about them:

- **Sidebar:** One of the first things you may notice when opening Messages is that the sidebar, where your recent contacts are listed, may display only icons rather than names and message snippets. This is done to save space, but it’s unhelpful if most of your contacts don’t have photos or avatars. To restore the sidebar to full width, drag the vertical divider to the right. (Likewise, if you’re seeing a full-width sidebar and you want to shrink it, drag the divider toward the left.)

- **Pinned conversations:** If you have lots of conversations and end up having to scroll or search frequently to find one you want to continue, you can now pin one or more of them at the top so they’re easier to find. To pin a conversation, right-click (or Control-click) it in the list and choose Pin from the contextual menu. You can pin up to nine conversations in this way.

- **Search:** The search field now gives you more options. Click once in it to see recent correspondents, plus images and documents you’ve sent or received. Click one of these items to jump directly to the conversation in question. You can also, of course, type in the search field to see a list of messages matching your search text.

- **Share Name and Photo:** A new preference (in Messages > Preferences > General), called Share Name and Photo, lets you automatically share your name and photo with other Apple users.

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(that is, people using iMessage on their Apple devices, as opposed to SMS) when you start a conversation. With that selected, you can choose Contacts Only (to share automatically only with people in your Contacts list) or Always Ask (to be prompted to share with anyone). Deselect this to avoid sharing your name and photo.

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**Use the App Store Menu**

In Messages for iOS and iPadOS, there has long been an App Store icon next to the field where you type the message text. Tapping this brings up a new row of icons, one of which takes you to the App Store where you can buy Messages add-ons such as games and stickers. That’s also what you tap to do unrelated things like access your photos and Apple Pay—but at least the App Store is one of the things that icon could lead to (as suggested subtly by the icon’s “stack” effect).

Well, in Big Sur, that icon has made the transition to the Mac, but weirdly the Mac App Store has no Messages add-ons, and you can’t access it at all from within Messages. Rather, this icon displays a pop-up menu with four useful, though unrelated, items:

- **Photos:** Choose this to bring up a photo picker that gives you direct (and searchable) access to all your images from Photos. This makes it much easier than previously to include photos in your messages.

- **Memoji Stickers:** Use stickers in your messages based on your own custom Memoji. There’s a lot more to say about this, so I address it separately in Use Memoji.

- **#images:** Choose this command to display a searchable picker of reaction images (including animated GIFs) you can add to your message with just one click.

- **Message Effects:** After typing some text, choose Message Effects to add garish, irritating animations (with sound effects) to your messages that will annoy your friends and confound your enemies. (I mean, do try these out, but let me just tell you from experience that they get old really fast.)

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Manage Notifications

For a number of years, Mac users have been accustomed to clicking the Notifications icon on the menu bar to display a slide-in view called Notification Center. Big Sur completely revamps this concept.

Display Notification Center

To show the new and improved Notification Center, click the time in your menu bar. You’ll see something like Figure 35.

Figure 35: The new Notification Center is much spiffier than before.

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Before I get to what’s actually in Notification Center, I should expand on that whole “click the time” thing. Prior to Big Sur, a menu bar clock was optional in macOS—you could turn it on or off in System Preferences > Date & Time > Clock, and you could ⌘-drag it left or right to your preferred spot. In Big Sur, it’s always on—and always at the far right side of your menu bar.

However, you can still customize it just as you could before (the only difference being that the Clock tab has been renamed Menu Bar Clock). You can turn on or off the day of the week, the month, the seconds, flashing time separators, a 24-hour clock, and (with a 12-hour clock) the AM/PM indicator. You can also select Analog rather than Digital, in which case the entire clock is replaced with a little analog clock dial icon (which displays the current time).

In any case, the clock—however it’s represented—is what you click!

Like the pre-Big Sur Notification Center, this new version shows upcoming calendar and reminder items, the weather, and stock prices. But the big change is notifications themselves, which appear above these widgets. Now, instead of a single, endlessly scrolling, reverse-chronological list, notifications are grouped by app in “stacks.” For example, back in Figure 35 you can see a single stack at the top, which contains two notifications from Setapp. If you see a stack, you can click it to expand it and show all the individual notifications inside. To collapse it again, click Show Less.

**Tip:** If you prefer an app’s notifications not be grouped, go to System Preferences > Notifications > App Name and choose “off” from the “Notification grouping” pop-up menu.

Notifications in Big Sur don’t merely show you information; they can also be interactive—for example, you can click and hold on a notification from Podcasts about a new episode to play that episode, or click and hold on a Mail notification to compose a reply right there.

To dismiss a notification, hover over it and click the X icon that appears in the upper-left corner. For an unexpanded stack, this icon
Improve Your Photos

Apple’s Photos app has seen a bunch of improvements in Big Sur. Since we have a whole book on Photos (*Take Control of Photos* by Jason Snell), which will soon be updated to cover both Big Sur and iOS 14/iPadOS 14, I won’t go into tremendous detail here. But I do want to offer an overview of what’s new.

Apart from the new, full-height sidebar (and some minor re-arrangement of items within it), Photos looks almost exactly the same as it did before. The improvements are partly to the way it works, and partly to specific tools and features.

### Navigate Your Collection

Apple made two enhancements to the way you view and navigate your photos, and they’re *subtle*, but nice:

- **Smooth zoom**: When you’re looking at a view with lots of thumbnails (say, all your videos or all your recent photos), you can zoom in or out using ⌘++ and ⌘–, as before. However, in Big Sur, the zooms in and out are now smooth rather than abrupt switches between magnification levels.

- **Better memories**: Apple has improved the Memories algorithm to give you better selections of photos and videos. The soundtracks you can play when viewing memories as movies have the same names, but now adjust themselves to the length of each selection. And, for memories that include videos, video stabilization is reportedly better.

### Enhance Photos and Videos

Although the editing tools in Photos aren’t nearly as elaborate as those in standalone images editors such as Photoshop, Acorn, Pixelmator, or...
Affinity Photo, they’re handy for quick edits—and highly accessible for those without heavy-duty graphics apps (or the experience needed to use them). Photos in Big Sur improves these tools in a few ways:

• **Photo editing:** Edit a photo by double-clicking it and then clicking Edit on the toolbar. In this mode, a few new (or improved) options are now available:

  - **Vibrance:** If you click Color in the right-hand sidebar and, underneath that, click Options (**Figure 37**), you’ll see that besides Saturation and Cast, there’s a third option, Vibrance, which replaces Contrast. (You can still adjust contrast under the Light options.) The Vibrance slider has an effect similar to that of Saturation, except that it operates more strongly on colors that are already less saturated, producing a more natural-looking result.

  ![Figure 37: A new Vibrance slider lets you adjust saturation with more natural hues.](image)

  - **Filter intensity:** As before, if you click the Filters tab at the top, you get a selection of nine predefined filters for effects such as Vivid, Dramatic, and Noir. Now, however, when you select one of these effects, it turns into a slider that lets you adjust the intensity to your liking (**Figure 38**). So you can make your photo 37% more dramatic, if you like.
Learn New Safari Tricks

Safari 14 ships with Big Sur, and is also available as an optional download for Catalina and Mojave. Although the basics of using Safari remain the same, and casual users may notice few if any differences, the app has become faster and more power-efficient while adding quite a few useful features—including significant enhancements to privacy.

There’s not much to say about behind-the-scenes improvements like faster browsing that doesn’t run down your battery as fast—or new tools for developers—but I do want to explore the new user-facing features that will change the way you browse the web.

**Note:** One behind-the-scenes change many people will appreciate is support for 4K HDR (high dynamic range) playback of YouTube videos! (This applies only in Big Sur, however.)

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### Customize Your Start Page

When you open a new window or tab, Safari can display the homepage of your choice, an empty page (my personal preference), or the same page you were on before (if any). In earlier versions of Safari, two other options were Favorites (the sites you’ve designated as your personal favorites) and Top Sites (those Safari notices you’ve visited most often). Safari 14 combines Favorites and Top Sites into a new, much more customizable option called Start Page.

To display the Start Page at any time (regardless of your preferences), choose Bookmarks > Show Start Page. You’ll see something like Figure 39. If you want the Start Page to appear when you open a new window and/or tab, go to Safari > Preferences > General and choose Start Page from the “New windows open with” and/or “New tabs open with” pop-up menus.
Figure 39: An example of the Start Page in Safari.

By default, your Favorites appear at the top, followed by Frequently Visited (similar to the Top Sites category in earlier versions of Safari). Several other sections follow, but you can customize exactly what appears on this page, in what order, and with what options.

To make changes to the page, click the settings icon in the lower-right corner of the window. A popover (Figure 40) appears. Check or uncheck an option to enable or disable it. (Although you can change which sections appear, you cannot reorder the sections.)
Discover All the Little Things

In addition to the bigger features that each deserved their own chapter, Big Sur includes dozens of small (but sometimes quite significant) changes. In this chapter, I offer a quick overview of what else is new. Although I don’t catalog every tiny change, I attempt to hit the most important highlights.

The survey begins with what I’m calling “Other System Improvements,” which is to say things that affect your Mac as a whole or involve technologies that are available across apps. Then, in Other App Improvements, I discuss noteworthy changes in various apps that Apple bundles with Big Sur.

Other System Improvements

The following changes in Big Sur apply to multiple apps or to the system as a whole.

Automatic Wireless Headphone Switching

If you have any of Apple’s newer wireless headphones or ear buds that use the H1 chip, including the second-generation (2019 or later) AirPods, the AirPods Pro, Beats Solo Pro, Powerbeats, or Powerbeats Pro, they will now switch automatically between devices to which they’ve previously been paired. When you start using a different device, a banner should appear to tell you that it’s now sending its audio to your headphones.

**Note:** I was unable to test this feature personally, as my AirPods are from the previous generation.
Apple Arcade Features

If you search in your thesaurus for “gamer,” you’ll see my name listed there...right under *antonyms*. I don’t believe I’ve ever met another human with less of an interest in games than I have. So I hope you appreciate the gigantic sacrifice I made by signing up for a free one-month trial of Apple Arcade *just* so I can see for myself what’s new in Big Sur and write about it here!

If you’re already an Apple Arcade subscriber, you know that, on a Mac, the place to go to find new games is the Arcade tab in the App Store. (If you’re not already a subscriber, far be it from me to tempt you to join!)

Here are the new things you’ll see on that tab:

- **Games popular with your friends:** I can’t speak from personal experience here, because my only Game Center friend is my wife, who is only slightly more enthusiastic about games than I am. But I’m reliably informed that recommendations based on what your friends are playing will appear prominently here.

- **Achievements:** The individual App Store pages for each game you’re playing now have an Achievements section where you can see your progress and goals. Click the main banner to get more information on individual achievements.

- **Continue playing:** One cool feature of Apple Arcade—*if you like that sort of thing*—is that you can play games on any of your Apple devices, then switch to a different device and pick right up where you left off. A “Continue Playing” section on the Arcade tab shows you which in-progress games you can pick up and lets you open them with one click.

- **Sorting and filtering:** Apple says that you’ll be able to sort and filter games on the Arcade tab by criteria such as release date and controller support. I haven’t seen this yet as of November 12, 2020.

- **Coming Soon:** A new Coming Soon category includes games that are about to be released; click Get to be notified when they’re available.
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About the Author and Publisher

Joe Kissell is the author of more than 60 books and hundreds of articles about technology. In 2017, he also became the publisher of Take Control Books, when alt concepts inc.—the company he runs along with his wife, Morgen Jahnke—acquired the Take Control series from TidBITS Publishing Inc.’s owners, Adam and Tonya Engst. Before he began writing full-time in 2003, Joe managed software development for a living. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and a master’s degree in Linguistics.

In his hypothetical spare time, Joe likes to travel, walk, cook, eat, and practice t’ai chi. He lives in San Diego with Morgen; their sons, Soren and Devin; and their cat, Zora. To contact Joe about this book, send him email and please include Take Control of Big Sur in the subject. You can also sign up for joeMail, his low-volume mailing list, follow him on Twitter (@joekissell), or visit his blog at JoeKissell.com.

Credits

- Publisher: Joe Kissell
- Editor: Kelly Turner
- Cover design: Sam Schick of Neversink
- Logo design: Geoff Allen of FUN is OK

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