Chapter 1: Personalizing Your Desktop

In This Chapter
✓ Taking control of each desktop level
✓ Traipsing through themes
✓ Starting a screen saver in a flash
✓ Finding the real story on how Windows puts together your desktop

It's your desktop. Do with it what you will.

You might think it'd be easy for a computer to slap windows on the screen, but it isn’t. In fact, Windows 7 uses six separate layers to produce that Windows 7, er, vista — and you can take control of every layer. I show you how in this chapter.

I also include a discussion of desktop themes, backgrounds in Windows Explorer, and the deservedly famous (but oh-so-derivative) Windows 7 gadgets. Pretty cool stuff.

Most importantly, I include instructions for creating a Super Boss Key in the later section “Selecting Screen Savers.” Whenever you press a key combination that you choose — say, Alt+F10 — a Windows 7 screen saver immediately springs into action. If you've ever been surprised when the boss walked in as you were dusting off your résumé, day trading, or playing a mean game of Minesweeper, you now know how to cover your tracks. You’re welcome.

Recognizing Desktop Levels

The Windows 7 desktop — that is, the collection of stuff you see on your computer screen — consists of six layers (see Figure 1-1, which shows five of the six layers).

For a quick change of pace, desktop themes change five of the six layers, all at once. I talk about desktop themes in the section “Using Desktop Themes,” later in this chapter.
These six layers control how Windows dishes up your desktop:

- **Level 1:** At the bottom, the Windows 7 desktop has a base color, which is a solid color that you see only if you don’t have a desktop background picture or if your chosen background doesn’t fill the entire screen. Most people never see their Windows base color because the background usually covers it up. I tell you how to set the base color and all the other Windows colors — for dialog boxes, the taskbar, the works — in the next section of this chapter.

- **Level 2:** Above the base color lives the Windows desktop background. (Microsoft used to call it wallpaper, and you see that name frequently.) In Figure 1-1, my dad’s photo appears as the desktop background. It isn’t stretched to fit the full screen, which is why you can see the base color.

The people who sold you your computer may have placed some sort of dorky ad on the desktop. I tell you how to get rid of the ad and replace it with a picture you want in the section “Picking a Background,” later in this chapter.
Setting Color Schemes in Windows 7

Windows 7 ships with 16 prebuilt designer color schemes; the “Sky” blue version of Aero is the scheme of choice. You can change to a different designer scheme or invent one all your own. To change color schemes, follow these steps:
1. Right-click any empty part of the Windows desktop and choose Personalize.

The Change the Visuals and Sounds on Your Computer dialog box appears.

2. At the bottom, click the link that says Window Color.

Windows 7 opens the Window Color and Appearance dialog box (see Figure 1-2).

3. To speed up the display on your computer (but zap one of the coolest Windows 7 features), deselect the Enable Transparency check box.

The transparency feature (you can see its effect around the Windows Explorer box in Figure 1-1) is named Glass, for reasons that escape me at the moment. When Windows Vista came out, everybody ooooh’ed and aaah’d about something named Aero Glass. It was billed as one of the top new Windows Vista features. As you can see from this dialog box, Aero is now named Sky — it’s one of 16 color schemes on offer — and Glass equates to a check box labeled Enable Transparency (the same as in Vista). I commonly hear the terms Aero, Glass, Aero Glass, and Time Flies Like an Aero used interchangeably. *Sic transit gloria computerii.*

If your PC can’t run the Glass interface — either you don’t have a powerful enough video card to run the Glass interface or you got conned into buying Windows 7 Starter edition — you may not see the choices in Figure 1-2. See Book I, Chapter 3 for the maddening details.
4. Be sure to click the Show Color Mixer down arrow and then, in the Pick a Color box, click the default Sky, Twilight, Sea, Leaf, or Lime icon or whichever color scheme appeals to you.

The Hue, Saturation, Brightness, and Transparency sliders move when you click new color schemes. The eight designer color schemes are just recommendations for specific transparency, hue, saturation, and brightness settings.

5. Choose one of the prebuilt color schemes, or mix and match your own by moving the Transparency, Hue, Saturation, and Brightness sliders. When you're done, click the OK button.

Your chosen color scheme takes effect immediately.

To make Windows 7 look a little bit like the older versions of Windows, you can click the Advanced Appearance Options link. That opens the old-fashioned Windows Color and Appearance dialog box (see Figure 1-3), which hasn't changed much since the days of Windows 95.

Figure 1-3: Appearance settings for truly retro shenanigans.

If you want to change the Windows base color — Level 1, in my earlier discussion “Recognizing Desktop Levels” — you can do so by changing the Color 1 box for the Desktop item (refer to Figure 1-3).
By and large, the Advanced settings there haven’t changed much since Windows 3.1. (Yes, the same old bugs are still there.) Windows 7 doesn’t warn you about one key feature of these advanced settings: Everything here is virtually obsolete. You can make changes till you’re blue in the face, but you see little effect in Windows 7 itself. Buggy-whip stuff.

**Picking a Background**

If you installed Windows 7 from a CD, you had a chance to choose your initial wallpaper, er, desktop background.

If you bought a PC with Windows 7 preinstalled, the manufacturer chose your background — maybe the manufacturer’s own logo or something a bit more subtle, like Buy Wheaties. Don’t laugh. The background is up for sale. PC manufacturers can include whatever they like. You probably have an AOL icon on your desktop. Same thing. Guess who bought and paid for that?

There’s nothing particularly magical about the desktop background. In fact, Windows 7 can put any picture on your desktop — big one, little one, ugly one — even a picture stolen straight off the Web. Here’s how to personalize your desktop:

1. **Right-click any empty part of the Windows desktop and choose Personalize.**
   
   The Change the Visuals and Sounds on Your Computer dialog box appears.
   
   If you want to use one of Windows’ built-in combinations of desktop background, window color, sound scheme and screen saver, you can simply choose among the Aero Themes or High Contrast Themes on offer.

2. **At the bottom, click the link marked Desktop Background.**

   Windows 7 shows you the Choose Your Desktop Background dialog box, shown in Figure 1-4.

3. **Click the Picture Location drop-down box and choose from many different wallpapers that ship with Windows 7. You can also click the Browse button and choose any picture you like.**

   If you hover your mouse over a picture, Windows shows you a description of the picture, and a check box appears in the upper left corner. If you select the check box, Windows adds that particular picture to its background slide show. You can put dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of pictures in your slide show collection. And, at the bottom of the screen, you can change the speed of the slide show.
Keep in mind that cycling through desktop backgrounds quickly can create noticeable delays in your daily activities. Notebook and netbook owners should avoid setting the delay to high levels because of the additional, completely unnecessary, battery drain.

The Solid Colors category changes the base color of the desktop (see the section “Recognizing Desktop Levels,” earlier in this chapter) — the color that shows through if your desktop background doesn’t fit the whole screen.

4. If your picture is too big or too small to fit on the screen, you need to tell Windows how to shoehorn it into the available space. Use the drop-down Picture Position list. Details are in Table 1-1.

5. Click the OK button and then the red X button to close the Personalize Appearance and Sounds dialog box.

Your desktop slide show begins immediately.

Windows 7 lets you right-click a picture — a JPG or GIF file, regardless of whether you’re using Windows Explorer or Internet Explorer or even Firefox — and choose Set As Desktop Background (in Windows Explorer) or Use As Background (in Internet Explorer or Firefox). When you do so, Windows 7 makes a copy of the picture and puts it in the C: \ Users \ username \ AppData \ Roaming \ Microsoft folder and then sets the picture as your background.
### Table 1-1 Picture Position Settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>What It Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fill</td>
<td>Windows 7 expands the picture to fit the entire screen and then crops the edges. The picture doesn’t appear distorted, but the sides or top and bottom may get cut off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit</td>
<td>The screen is letterboxed. Windows 7 makes the picture as big as possible within the confines of the screen and then shows the base color in stripes along the top and bottom (or left and right). No distortion occurs, and you see the entire picture, but you also see ugly strips on two edges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch</td>
<td>The picture is stretched to fit the screen. Expect distortions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tile</td>
<td>The picture is repeated as many times as necessary to fill the screen. If it’s too large to fit on the screen, you see the Fill options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>This one is the same as the Fit setting except that the letterboxing goes on all four sides.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Controlling Icons

Straight out of the box, Windows 7 ships with exactly one icon: the Recycle Bin. Microsoft found that most people appreciate a clean desktop, devoid of icons — but it also found that hiding the Recycle Bin confused the living daylights out of all its guinea pigs (er, usability lab test subjects). So Microsoft compromised by making the desktop squeaky clean except for the Recycle Bin: Aero Glass and a Recycle Bin. Who could ask for more?

If you bought a PC with Windows 7 preloaded, you probably have so many icons on the desktop that you can’t see straight. That desktop real estate is expensive, and the manufacturers receive a pretty penny for dangling the right icons in your face. Know what? You can delete all of them, without feeling the least bit guilty. The worst you’ll do is delete a shortcut to a manufacturer’s tech support software, and if you need to get to the program, the tech support rep can tell you how to find it from the Start menu.

Windows 7 gives you several simple tools for arranging icons on your desktop. If you right-click any empty part of the desktop, you see that you can

- Choose Sort By and sort icons by name, size, or type (folders, documents, and shortcuts, for example) or by the date on which the icon was last modified.
- Choose View and autoarrange icons — that is, have Windows 7 arrange them in an orderly fashion, with the first icon in the upper-left corner, the second one directly below the first one, the third one below it, and so on.
Controlling Icons 235

✦ Choose View, and if you don’t want to have icons arranged automatically, at least you can choose Windows Align to Grid so that you can see all the icons without one appearing directly on top of the other.

✦ You can even choose View and then deselect the Show Desktop Icons check box. Your icons disappear — but that kinda defeats the purpose of icons, doesn’t it?

In general, you can remove an icon from the Windows desktop by right-clicking it and choosing Delete or by clicking it once and pressing Delete.

Some icons are hard wired: If you put a Word document on your desktop, for example, the document inherits the icon — the picture — of its associated application, Word. The same goes for Excel worksheets, text documents, and recorded audio files. Icons for pictures look like the picture, more or less, if you squint hard.

Icons for shortcuts, however, can be changed at will. (I talk about shortcuts in Book II, Chapter 1.) Follow these steps to change an icon — that is, the picture — on a shortcut:

1. Right-click the shortcut and choose Properties.

2. In the Properties dialog box, click the Change Icon button.

3. Pick an icon from the offered list, or click the Browse button and go looking for icons.

   Windows abounds with icons. See Table 1-2 for some likely hunting grounds.

4. Click the OK button twice.

   Windows changes the icon permanently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1-2</th>
<th>Places to Look for Icons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contents</strong></td>
<td><strong>File</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows 7 and Vista icons</td>
<td>c:\Windows\system32\imageres.dll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>C:\Windows\System32\shell32.dll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>C:\Windows\explorer.exe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>C:\Windows\System32\pifmgr.dll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folders</td>
<td>C:\Windows\System32\syncui.dll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old programs</td>
<td>C:\Windows\System32\moricons.dll</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lots and lots of icons are available on the Internet. Use your favorite search engine to search for the term free Windows icons.
Changing Mouse Pointers

Believe it or not, Microsoft has spent many thousands of person-hours honing its mouse pointers. The pointers you see in a standard Windows 7 installation have been selected to give you the best possible visual “clues,” without being overly distracting.

What? You think they’re boring? Yeah, me too.

You can control your mouse pointer destiny in three different ways:

✦ Choose a new desktop theme that includes pointers. The themes that ship with Windows 7 all use the same mouse pointers, but other themes are available that change your pointers, sounds, and the like. (If you ever saw the Microsoft Dangerous Creatures theme with its poisonous frog mouse pointer, you’ll never forget.) I talk about desktop themes in the section “Using Desktop Themes,” later in this chapter.

✦ Select and change individual pointers. Then you can turn, say, the Windows “I’m busy but not completely tied up” mouse pointer (named Working in Background in Windows) into, oh, a dinosaur.

✦ Change all your pointers, wholesale, according to schemes that Microsoft has constructed.

To change individual pointers or to select from the prefab pointer schemes, follow these steps:

1. Right-click any empty part of the desktop and choose Personalize. On the left side of the screen, click the Change Mouse Pointers link.

The Mouse Properties dialog box appears, with the Pointers tab showing (see Figure 1-5).

2. Modify your pointers in any of these ways:

• To change all pointers at the same time, pick a new pointer scheme from the Scheme drop-down list.

• To change an individual pointer, click the pointer in the Customize box and then click the Browse button.

Windows shows you all available pointers — which number in the hundreds. Choose the pointer you want, and click the Open button.

• To bring back the original scheme, choose Windows Aero (System Scheme), which is probably the one you started with.

• To change an individual pointer back to the original pointer for the particular scheme you have chosen, click the pointer in the Customize box and then click the Use Default button.
3. When you settle on a set of pointers that appeal to you, click the Save As button and give your new, custom scheme a name so that you can retrieve it at any time.

4. Click the OK button.
   Windows starts using the pointers you chose.

**Selecting Screen Savers**

Windows screen savers are absolutely, totally, utterly, 100 percent for fun. Ten or 15 years ago, screen savers served a real purpose — they kept monitors from “burning in” the phosphors in frequently used parts of the screen. Nowadays, monitors aren’t nearly as prone to burn-in (or burnout — as can be the case with humans!), and saving screens rates right up there with manufacturing buggy whips on the obsolescence scale. Flat-panel LCD monitors (such as a laptop’s screen) don’t have phosphors, so there’s nothing to burn.

Now that Windows itself can run a slide show of desktop backgrounds, the demand for screen savers has taken a big hit.

Still, screen savers are amusing, and if you follow the tricks in the following sections, they serve one truly important function: A screen saver makes an excellent front for a Super Boss Key — a key you can press whenever Da Boss makes an unexpected, unwanted appearance.
Selecting Screen Savers

Changing the screen saver
Follow these steps to select a screen saver:

1. Right-click any empty part of the desktop and choose Personalize. In the lower-right corner of the screen, click the Screen Saver link.

   Windows 7 shows you the Screen Saver tab (see Figure 1-6).

2. Choose a screen saver from the Screen Saver drop-down box. Click the Settings button and take the screen saver for a test drive.

   Don’t like it? Pick another one.

3. Select or deselect the On Resume, Display Logon Screen check box.

   This setting can be a bit confusing. Basically, it controls what happens when the computer “wakes up” after the screen saver kicks in:

   - When the On Resume, Display Logon Screen check box is selected:
     When the computer wakes up, it shows the Windows logon screen. If the user who was logged on has an account that requires a password, she must reenter her password to get back into Windows. (I talk about passwords in the section on changing user settings in Book II, Chapter 2.)
Selecting Screen Savers

4. When you’re happy with your screen saver settings, click the OK button.

The screen saver kicks in whenever a sufficient length of time passes with no activity.

To get rid of your current screen saver, right-click an empty spot on the desktop, choose Personalize, click the Screen Saver link at the bottom, and select None in the Screen Saver drop-down list. Click the OK button, and your screen will never be saved again.

If you want to download screen savers from the Internet, be aware of one painful fact: The overwhelming majority of “free” screen savers you find on the Web carry spyware, adware, and various kinds of scumware, which are installed when you install the screen saver. To minimize the chances of hauling dreck into your computer, make sure that you have the Firefox Attack Site feature or Internet Explorer malware protection working. Personally, I like the selection at wincustomize.com.

What’s with the pug?

All right. I confess. If you look at Figure 1-6 closely, you see that I too run a screen saver. I bet you’ve seen it: A little dog — a pug — licks the inside of your screen and keeps trying to get it clean but never quite makes it. I identify with the pug’s Sisyphean-ness, if that’s a word that can be repeated in a family publication.

The screen saver has a fascinating story behind it. I first bumped into the version posted by Tim Lester, publisher of the Midwestern Bio-Ag Bio-News, on his Web site, Nuganics.com.au. Nuganics stands for nutrition-based organics. Tim’s very involved in efforts aimed at stopping genetically modified food, and other healthy-farming issues, from his base near Marcoola, Queensland, in Australia.

It ends up that Tim got the video of the dogs from the Web — but after days of trying, I couldn’t find the original source of the footage. An early version is at www.linein.org/blog/2008/01/11/free-screen-cleaner. Linein credits the Warner Brother’s film Must Love Dogs, at www2.warnerbros.com/mustlovedogs/downloads.html. Whatever its origins, the screen saver is one of the most popular of all time, right up there with the 3D aquarium and its gurgling fish. You can download the dog screen saver for free from www.nuganics.com.au/2008/01/25/screen-cleaner-screen-saver. It works well on Windows 7. And, yes, there’s a cat version — four different dogs, at last count.
Setting up a Super Boss Key

Here’s the trick you’ve been waiting for — the reason you turned to this chapter in the first place. You can use screen savers to create a Super Boss Key — a key combination, such as Alt+F10, that you can press to make the PC immediately switch over to running the screen saver. The Super Boss Key runs independently of the usual Windows screen saver stuff: The Super Boss Key doesn’t affect the screen saver you set up to run on your computer when it’s idle. The screen saver is just a handy program that doesn’t look the least bit suspicious if your boss glances at your PC’s monitor.

Setting up the Super Boss Key is quite simple because Microsoft fixed the Search function in Windows 7. (In Vista, you had to jump through all sorts of hoops.) Here’s how:

1. **Choose Start ➦ Computer. In the Search box, in the upper-right corner, type *.scr and press Enter.**

   Windows responds with a list of all .scr files — all the screen savers — on your computer, as shown in Figure 1-7. (If you don’t see scr at the end of the filenames, rap your knuckles for me and look at the section on showing filename extensions in Book II, Chapter 1.)

2. **Right-click the screen saver you want to use for the Super Boss Key, and choose Send To ➦ Desktop (Create Shortcut).**

   Most filenames are obviously associated with specific screen savers, but a couple of them are tricky. Table 1-3 lists the screen savers that ship with Windows 7.

   A shortcut to the corresponding .scr file appears on your desktop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen Saver</th>
<th>File</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3D Text</td>
<td>ssText3d.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Aurora.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>scrnsave.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bubbles</td>
<td>Bubbles.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystify</td>
<td>ssmyst.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>PhotoScreensaver.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribbons</td>
<td>Ribbons.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows Energy</td>
<td>ssBranded.scr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows Logo</td>
<td>logon.scr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. On the desktop, right-click the new shortcut and choose Properties.
   The Shortcut Properties dialog box appears, as shown in Figure 1-8.
   Yes, yes, I use the pug licking screen cleaner. You caught me. The boss
   likes dogs. Heh-heh-heh.

4. Click once in the Shortcut Key field, and then press the key combina-
   tion you want to use to activate the Super Boss Key, er, screen saver.
   In Figure 1-8, I chose Alt+F10 (that is, hold down the Alt key and then
   press F10).

5. Click the OK button, and your Super Boss Key is complete.
   Test it — press the key combination you chose. The puppies take a little
   while to get going; the built-in screen savers spring to life much faster.
A few programs “swallow” certain odd key combinations — if such a program is running, it grabs the key combinations and doesn’t hand them over to Windows, so Windows doesn’t know that you want to run your Super Boss Key screen saver. I haven’t found many programs that swallow Alt+F10, but some undoubtedly exist. Test the Super Boss Key in all your favorite clandestine situations before you really need to use it, okay? If you find that your chosen key combination doesn’t work with an important program (the worst offenders are games), try different key combinations until you find one that makes the Super Boss Key work.

If you want to gussy up your Super Boss Key screen saver, right-click the shortcut and choose Configure. You can change all the screen saver’s settings.

Using Desktop Themes

Windows desktop themes incorporate many settings in one easy-to-choose package. The themes revolve around specific topics that frequently (and refreshingly) have nothing to do with Windows — say, cars with carapaces, cavorting carnivores, or carnal caruncles. A theme includes five of the six desktop levels I discuss in this chapter plus a few extra goodies — a base color for the desktop, a background, settings for fonts and colors of the working windows, pictures for the reserved Windows icons (Recycle Bin and Documents, for example), a set of mouse pointers, and a screen saver. A theme can also include a set of custom sounds associated with various Windows events.

To bring in a new theme, follow these steps:

1. **Right-click any open spot on the desktop and choose Personalize.**
   Windows shows you the Change the Visuals and Sounds on Your Computer dialog box.

2. **On the right, click the Get More Themes Online link.**
   Windows opens the Microsoft Windows 7 personalization home page. At least as of this writing, it contains free themes that work well with Windows 7, along with a host of other Windows 7-centric items, including gadgets.

3. **If you can find a theme you like, click the download link underneath it.** In Firefox, tell the downloader that you want to open the file by using the themepackfile program. In Internet Explorer, just click Open, then Allow when prompted.
   The themepackfile program adds the downloaded theme you selected to the My Themes collection, as shown in Figure 1-9.
4. After the new theme has been downloaded, go back to the Change the Visuals and Sounds on Your Computer dialog box and choose the theme you like.

Safely back in the Change the Visuals and Sounds on Your Computer dialog box, you can make whatever changes you like.

When you bring in a theme, it might contain five of the six desktop levels I discuss in this chapter, plus a new sound scheme: Some themes have only a few of those items; some have all. If you switch themes, the old background, icon pictures, mouse pointers, and screen savers all remain on your PC — the new theme doesn’t delete them — but if you want to get any of them back, you have to go through the customization steps you followed earlier.

Zillions of Windows desktop themes are available on the Web, many of them quite good, and most of them can work with Windows 7. My comment in the screen saver section of this chapter applies here in spades: Watch out for scumware. To be on the safe side, visit wincustomize.com or themeworld.com for thousands of free themes.

**Seeing Your Desktop Clearly**

The best, biggest monitor in the world “don’t mean jack” if you can’t see the text on the screen. Windows 7 contains a handful of utilities and settings that can help you whup your monitor upside the head and improve its appearance.
With apologies to Billy Crystal, sometimes it is more important to look good than to feel good.

**Setting the screen resolution**

I don’t know how many people ask me how to fix this new monitor they just bought. The screen doesn’t look right. Must be that %$#@! Windows, yes? The old monitor looked just fine.

Nine times out of ten, when somebody tells me that a new monitor doesn’t look right, I ask whether the person adjusted the screen resolution. Invariably, the answer is No. So here’s the quick course — the answer to one of the questions I hear most.

If you plug in a new monitor (or put together a new computer) and the screen looks fuzzy, the most likely culprit entails a mismatch between the resolution your computer expects and the resolution your monitor wants. To a first approximation, a screen resolution is just the number of dots that appear on the screen, usually expressed as two numbers: 1680 x 1050, for example. Every flat-panel screen has exactly one resolution that looks right and a zillion other resolutions that make things look like you fused your monitor with the end of a Coke bottle.

Setting the screen resolution is easy: Right-click any empty place on the desktop and choose Screen Resolution. You see the Screen Resolution dialog box, shown in Figure 1-10. (If you have more than one monitor, or certain kinds of video cards, you might see multiple monitors in the top box.)
Changing the screen resolution is as simple as clicking the Resolution drop-down list and picking the resolution you want. That’s the easy part.

The hard part? Figuring out which resolution your monitor likes: its native resolution. Some monitors have the resolution printed on a sticker that might still adhere to the front. (Goo Gone works wonders.) All monitors have their native resolutions listed in the manual. (You do have your monitor’s manual, yes? No, I don’t either.)

If you don’t know your monitor’s native resolution, Google is your friend. Go to www.google.com and type native resolution followed by your monitor’s model number, which you can (almost) always find engraved in the bezel or stuck on the side. For example, typing native resolution 226BW immediately finds the native resolution for a Samsung 226BW monitor.

**Activating and adjusting ClearType**

Misbehaving text can make your monitor look fuzzy, too.

Not too many years ago, ClearType — the proprietary Microsoft method of sharpening the appearance of text on a screen — was considered a bleeding-edge technology that just didn’t work right on some monitors.

Times have changed. Now, every monitor, without exception, is designed to work well with ClearType. Monitor manufacturers put it in their design specs.

If you have an older CRT “tube” monitor, you might want to turn off ClearType because it can make fonts look fuzzy. But almost every flat-screen monitor can benefit from what ClearType has to offer. (Industry icon Steve Gibson has an excellent description of ClearType and its supremacy on LCD displays at grc.com/cleartype.htm.)

You can adjust ClearType so that it works best on your monitor, under your lighting conditions. To open the ClearType Text Tuner, choose Start ➤ Control Panel ➤ Appearance and Personalization and then, at the bottom under Fonts, click the Adjust ClearType Text Settings link.

**Showing larger fonts**

If your eyes aren’t what they used to be — and mine never were — you might want to tell Windows to increase the size of text and other items on the screen. It’s just enough boost to help, particularly if you’re at an Internet café and forgot your glasses.

To adjust the size of fonts (actually, everything), choose Start ➤ Control Panel ➤ Appearance and Personalization. Under the Display icon, click the Make Text and Other Items Larger or Smaller link. You see the choices shown in Figure 1-11.
Using magnification

If you need more “zoom” than the font enlarger can offer, click the Magnifier link (refer to Figure 1-11; the link is in the first paragraph), and the Windows Magnifier appears. The Magnifier lets you zoom the entire screen by a factor of 200, 300, or 400 — or as high as you like.

Note that magnifying doesn’t increase the quality or resolution of text or pictures. It makes them bigger, not finer. That CSI “David, can you make the picture sharper?” thing doesn’t work with Windows. Sorry, Grissom.

If these nostrums don’t do the job, you should take advantage of the Windows 7 high-contrast themes. They use color to make text, in particular, stand out. High-contrast themes are available from the Theme list, shown in Figure 1-9 and described in the section “Using Desktop Themes,” earlier in this chapter.