By now you've probably seen Apple's excellent TV ads for the iMac DV that show how Apple's iMovie software can turn your computer into a home movie studio.

For years, Apple (and everybody else) has been talking about real digital video on the desktop, but it was such an expensive proposition that only pros dared to enter that game, but iMovie is the real deal for quality home videos. Real, crisp, clean FULL-SCREEN movies that anyone could use to instantly create their own iMovies (which you can then put on the Web, export back out to tape, or whatever). No special cards to install, no weird wiring schemes, there's not even any software to install (it comes preinstalled on iMac DVs), and it's about as slick a setup as we've seen. It's the kind of software application that makes you want to buy an iMac DV (even if you already have a G4).

So, all this being said, we felt we HAD to show how unbelievably easy iMovie is to use, so here's our step-by-step on how to become your own big shot movie producer using an iMac DV and Apple's wonderful new iMovie software.

Before we use iMovie (this is going to seem kind of obvious), go out and shoot some video on your digital camcorder. iMovie works with Digital Video only, so you must use a digital video camcorder (not a VHS, not a Hi-8; it must be a digital video camcorder). If you have a camcorder that is three or four years old, that's like having a Mac that's three or four years old. It's outdated and old technology. Basically, chunk it, and get a DV camcorder - it'll change your life. The quality of these DV camcorders is stunning and if you have any aspirations of doing desktop video (iMovie or otherwise), it's a digital world out there, so you might as well get on board. MacWorx can assist with your choice if you find all the camcorders out there bewizarding. Whatever else, make sure you buy a camcorder with DV in and out so that you can pass movies both from your camera to the Mac, but also, when you have finished, back from the Mac to the camcorder.

Now, assuming you have some digital video footage, let's get rolling:

**Step One:** First, you have to connect your DV camera to your iMac. This is simple. Your iMac DV comes with the FireWire cable you need, just plug one end into your digital camcorder's FireWire output (if it's a digital camcorder, it almost undoubtedly has a FireWire output), and plug the other end into your iMac DV's FireWire input. Then turn your digital camcorder on. When you launch iMovie, it immediately detects your camera. Now it's time to pull some video out of your digital camcorder.
Step Two: Importing clips from your digital camcorder is simple because iMovie actually operates your digital video camera for you and displays the contents of your tape in iMovie's Monitor window. See the "Play" button at the bottom centre of the Monitor window? Press it, and you'll hear your digital video camcorder start up and start playing what's on your tape. When you see a clip of video you want, press the Import button. When you've finished capturing the video clip, click the Import button again to stop importing.

Step Three: When you import a clip, a large thumbnail (showing the first frame from the clip you imported) will show up to the right of the Monitor window in an area called the Shelf. This area is used to store up to nine of your imported video clips (as shown above). To see a preview of any of the clips you've imported, click on one, and then press the Play button. If you've added a clip to your Shelf area that you're not going to use, click-and-drag its thumbnail into the trash can that appears below the right of your Shelf. It's like the Mac's trash can; your clip sits in there until you choose Empty Trash from the Edit menu. We highly recommend trashing those unwanted clips because they eat up some hefty drive space, and trashing unused clips can free up lots of hard drive space. Also, you can name your clips to help you stay organised by clicking on the default name (clip 01, clip 02, etc.) and typing in your own name.

Step Four: Continue capturing clips in this same manner - click Import to import a clip - click it again to stop. Within just a few minutes, you'll probably fill up your Shelf area (remember, it only holds nine clips), and you'll need to make more Shelf space. To open up some new spots, click-and-drag a few clips down to the Clip Viewer (it runs along the bottom of your screen). This is where you arrange your clips in the order you want them (but don't worry about that now, you can always change the order by clicking and dragging the thumbnails). To get a clip from the Shelf area to your Clip Viewer is easy: just click on the large thumbnail of the clip you want, then drag-and-drop it into your Clip Viewer. The thumbnail will now appear in your Clip Viewer window and is erased from the Shelf area, opening up a blank Shelf spot for you to import more clips.

Step Five: Now it's time to start playing big shot movie producer. Drag your clips into the Clip Viewer until they appear in the order you like them. If you want to change their order, click-and-drag them (in the Clip Viewer) to appear in the order you want. To see a preview of the movie you're creating in the Clip Viewer, press the Play button and it will appear in the Monitor window. The clips will play one after another with no break in between. However, you can add some nice transitions between your clips, like a Fade In, Fade Out, Cross Dissolve, etc. from within iMovie.
Step Six: Transitions (how your movie will move from clip to clip) are added to your movie in progress from the Effects palette, which hovers conveniently to the right of your Monitor window. To access iMovie's built-in transitions click the blue Transitions button (in the Effects palette), and a selection of different transitions will pop up. To get one of these transitions into your Clip Viewer, click-and-drag its icon between any two video clips in your Clip Viewer.

Step Seven: You can see a preview of how this is going to actually look by clicking on the Preview button. You can control the speed of your transition using the slider just below the Preview button. You can keep dragging and dropping transitions into your Clip Viewer, but it does take a few (OK, more than a few) seconds for these transitions to "render" (render isn't the right word, but we don't know what is). A little red progress bar appears below the transition to let you know how long it will take. You might like to add a Fade In at the beginning of your video and perhaps a Fade Out at the end. We think you'll find that choosing transitions is one of the most fun parts of creating your iMovie and flexing your new movie mogul power.

Step Eight: Next, let's add an opening title. Again, this is done in the Effects palette. Click on the Titles button and up pops a dialog box for creating some very slick animated titles. When the Title dialog pops up, you have two text fields, one on top of the other. Type in the words you want in the top text field, and if you want a second line of text, highlight that field and type in that text. Pretty straightforward stuff. Next, choose your cool title effect from the pop-up menu. Click the Preview button to see a preview of your title screen appear in the Monitor window. When you find the one effect you want, click within the Title's preview window, and drag it down to where you want it in your Clip Viewer. If you drop it between two clips, don't worry, it'll nudge one out of the way to make room.

Step Nine: You can also add nice scrolling closing credits in the Title effect's dialog, as well. The top line is the job title (like Director), and the bottom line is the person's name. It even puts in all those little dots between their title and name. You can control the scrolling speed with the slider below the Preview button. You can also control the scroll direction with the little arrows next to the font pop-up. Did we mention you could choose a custom font and the colour of your background and type? You can - all within this dialog.

Step Ten: If you have any audio in your video footage, it's included when you import your video clips. But you can add your own sound effects, too (which is a blast), from the Effects palette. Press the Sound button, and a list of built-in sound effects appears. To get these sound effects into your movie, click on the little tab on the bottom left, (behind your Clip Viewer) that looks like a musical note. That's the Audio Viewer (shown above), and it lets you arrange your audio clips. You'll see the time line of your video, and the point at which each clip starts is already marked for you.
Step Eleven: Besides the sound effects that come built-in with iMovie, you can go to Apple's Web site, where Apple has provided a bunch of free downloadable looping audio tracks, sound effects, backgrounds, and lots of other goodies - all free for iMovie users. The URL is www.apple.com/imovie/freestuff/. Before we see our final movie, here are some helpful tips: See that blue bar below the preview? You can click on top of it and drag a "scrub" (Hollywood term) of your video and see your movie preview in real time as you drag. You can also crop the length of any clip by using this bar. Just click below it, and you can drag out a marker for the length of the clip you want to keep. Then go under the Edit menu and choose Crop to save just that part of the clip.

Step Twelve: Once you've got your clips in order, added some sound effects, too many titles, and have your transitions all picked out, it's time to see your movie. Click the Full Screen Mode button (on the left side, below the Monitor window; it's the third button from your left), and your movie will play full screen on your iMac DV (as shown above). You also have the option of saving your movie as a QuickTime movie or saving your movie back to your digital camcorder without any loss of quality (this is accomplished by choosing Export Movie from the File menu). That way you can make a dub to VHS or connect your digital camcorder up to your TV, so you can invite friends and colleagues over to watch your directorial debut on the big screen.

Enjoy yourselves…