

# One of Apple's first computers for sale at auction

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Going ... going ... going crazy for the Apple 1.

One of these rare and beloved icons that launched Apple back in 1976 is going on the auction block next month. And since only a half-dozen of the original 200 beauties are still bootable, auction house Sotheby's thinks this grandmother of all motherboards could go for \$180,000 or even more.

"This one's not only working, but it has all the original accessories that are often missing when an Apple 1 turns up," said Selby Kiffer, the

Sotheby's veteran who will be wielding the gavel in New York the morning of June 15. "We're particularly excited by the fact that it comes with the original operations manual. It's only 12 pages long and it doesn't look very important. But it's special because this will include everything you could have bought back in 1976."

That, alas, doesn't include a case, since the Apple 1 was sold simply as a fully-assembled circuit board, minus a shell, [power supply](#), monitor and keyboard. Back at the early dawn of [personal computing](#), the Apple1 was a pretty bare-bones affair, and it was up to buyers to come up with those components themselves.

Still, after the 2010 sale at Christie's auction house of an Apple 1 with a signed letter from [Steve Jobs](#) for more than \$212,000 to an Italian computer collector, along with Sotheby's recent \$1.6 million sale of Apple's founding contract, Kiffer expects interest to be robust.

"I think it'll sell within our estimate of \$120,000-\$180,000 and maybe a bit above it," said Kiffer, who was the auctioneer when the Apple contract was sold. "That auction took seven minutes, which is a relatively long time. We thought it might go for a half-million, but we had no idea it would end up so high. That was exciting."

Sweetening the pot on the upcoming auction is the inclusion of a rare memo fired off by Steve Jobs during his days at Atari, nearly two years before he co-founded Apple in 1976. The memo lays out changes Jobs thought could be made to Atari's "World Cup Soccer" arcade game to spice it up. Typed on Atari letterhead, it includes an imprint of "All-One Farm Design," which the Sotheby's catalog describes as "the name appropriated from the commune he frequented at the time."

Perhaps best of all, the memo includes circuit designs in pencil and a Buddhist mantra that goes like this: "gate gate paragate parasangate

bodhi svahdl." Sotheby's expects the memo to fetch between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

Driven by multiple factors - Apple's astounding commercial successes with the iPhone and iPad, the untimely death of Steve Jobs, and perhaps today's cash-flush, tech-worshipping entrepreneurial set - the value of these ancient relics from the genesis of the personal computer has skyrocketed in the past decade.

"I've sold six or seven Apple 1s since 2000, when I brokered my first sale, and that one went for \$25,000," said Sellam Ismail, a Livermore, Calif., software programmer and founder of the Vintage Computer Festival. He keeps a running index of what he believes are the approximately 50 surviving Apple 1s, only a handful of them still working.

After arranging to sell one to Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen for \$28,000, Ismail says he last brokered an Apple 1 around 2008 for about \$30,000. So to see the Christie's sale price ratchet up to more than \$200,000 told Ismail that a new breed of collector had arrived.

"At first I thought that \$215,000 for an [Apple](#) 1 was a ridiculous amount," he said. "I figured the buyer had more money than brains. But I do think that this next one could go for \$180,000. For a long time this was a collector community of nerds who simply appreciated the technology and wanted to get their hands on it. Now these early computers have become collector's items, and it's starting to become the domain of the big-money people.

"With each new sale these things are becoming more and more valuable," he said. "I've always emphasized the historical and not the monetary value, and I didn't want it to become a rich man's game. But I guess it now is."

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