

Max Palevsky, a Pioneer in Computers, Dies at 85

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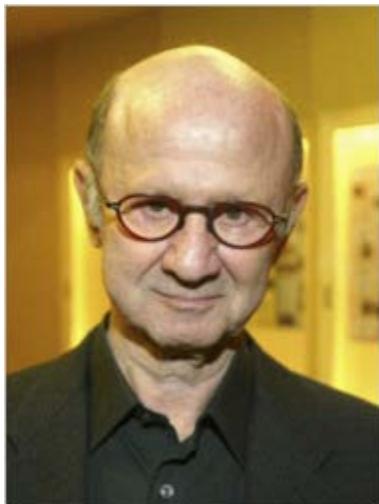
Max Palevsky, a pioneer in the computer industry and a founder of the computer-chip giant Intel who used his fortune to back Democratic presidential candidates and to amass an important collection of American Arts and Crafts furniture, died on Wednesday at his home in Beverly Hills, Calif. He was 85.

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D. Gorton/The New York Times

Max Palevsky in 1972 in his California home, when he was a major contributor to the presidential campaign of Senator George McGovern.



Matthew Simmons/Getty Images

Max Palevsky in 2005.

The cause was heart failure, said Angela Kaye, his assistant.

Mr. Palevsky became intrigued by computers in the early 1950s when he heard the mathematician [John von Neumann](#) lecture at the [California Institute of Technology](#) on the potential for computer technology. Trained in symbolic logic and mathematics, Mr. Palevsky was studying and teaching philosophy at the [University of California](#), Los Angeles, but followed his hunch and left the academy.

After working on logic design for the Bendix Corporation's first computer, in 1957 he joined the Packard Bell Computer Corporation, a new division of the electronics company Packard Bell.

In 1961, he and 11 colleagues from Packard Bell founded Scientific Data Systems to build small and medium-size business computers, a market niche they believed was being ignored by giants like I.B.M. The formula worked, and in 1969 Xerox bought the company for \$1 billion, with Mr. Palevsky taking home a 10 percent share of the sale.

In 1968 he applied some of that money to financing a small start-up company in Santa Clara to make semiconductors. It became Intel, today the world's largest producer of computer chips.

A staunch liberal, Mr. Palevsky first ventured into electoral politics in the 1960s when he became involved in the journalist Tom Braden's race for lieutenant governor of California and [Robert F. Kennedy](#)'s campaign for the presidency.

Mr. Palevsky pursued politics with zeal and whopping contributions of money. He bet heavily on Senator [George McGovern](#) — who first began running for the presidency in 1972 — donating more than \$300,000 to a campaign that barely existed.

His financial support and organizing work for [Tom Bradley](#), a Los Angeles city councilman, propelled Mr. Bradley, in 1973, to the first of his five terms as mayor. During the campaign, Mr. Palevsky recruited [Gray Davis](#) as Mr. Bradley's chief fund-raiser, opening the door to a political career for Mr. Davis that later led to the governorship.

Mr. Palevsky later became disenchanted with the power of money in the American political system and adopted campaign finance reform as his pet issue. Overcoming his lifelong aversion to Republican candidates, he raised money for Senator [John McCain](#) of Arizona, an advocate of campaign finance reform, during the 2000 presidential primary. Mr. Palevsky also became a leading supporter of the conservative-backed [Proposition 25](#), a state ballot initiative in 2000 that would limit campaign contributions by individuals and ban contributions by corporations.

Mr. Palevsky donated \$1 million to the Proposition 25 campaign, his largest political contribution ever. "I am making this million-dollar contribution in hopes that I will never again legally be allowed to write huge checks to California political candidates," he told [Newsweek](#).

His support put him in direct conflict with Governor Davis, the state [Democratic Party](#) and labor unions, whose combined efforts to rally voter support ended in the measure's defeat.

Max Palevsky was born on July 24, 1924, in Chicago. His father, a house painter who had immigrated from Russia, struggled during the Depression, and Mr. Palevsky described his childhood as “disastrous.”

During World War II he served with the Army Air Corps doing electronics repair work on airplanes in New Guinea. On returning home, he attended the [University of Chicago](#) on the G.I. Bill, earning bachelor’s degrees in mathematics and philosophy in 1948. He went on to do graduate work in mathematics and philosophy at the University of Chicago, the [University of California, Berkeley](#), and [U.C.L.A.](#)

Money allowed him to indulge his interests. He collected Modernist art, but in the early 1970s, while strolling through SoHo in Manhattan, he became fixated on a desk by the Arts and Crafts designer [Gustav Stickley](#). Mr. Palevsky amassed an important collection of Arts and Crafts furniture and Japanese woodcuts, which he donated to the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#).

He also plunged into film production. He helped finance [Terrence Malick](#)’s “[Badlands](#)” in 1973, and, with the former Paramount executive [Peter Bart](#), produced “[Fun With Dick and Jane](#)” in 2005, and, in 1977, “[Islands in the Stream](#).” In 1970 he rescued the foundering Rolling Stone magazine by buying a substantial block of its stock.

Mr. Palevsky married and divorced five times. He is survived by a sister, Helen Futterman of Los Angeles; a daughter, Madeleine Moskowitz of Los Angeles; four sons: Nicholas, of Bangkok, Alexander and Jonathan, both of Los Angeles, and Matthew, of Brooklyn; and four grandchildren.

Despite his groundbreaking work in the computer industry, Mr. Palevsky remained skeptical about the cultural influence of computer technology. In a catalog essay for an Arts and Crafts exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2005, he lamented “the hypnotic quality of computer games, the substitution of a Google search for genuine inquiry, the instant messaging that has replaced social discourse.”

He meant it too. “I don’t own a computer,” he told The Los Angeles Times in 2008. “I don’t own a cellphone, I don’t own any electronics. I do own a radio.”

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