

# Restoring the Tea Room

## Discoveries and Next Steps

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Research projects centered on Monticello's Tea Room have yielded new information about the space and its story, while innovative techniques provide the tools to interpret this unique room in original and dynamic ways.

Monticello's public spaces are slated for study and reinstallation, with the Tea Room being the premier project. One goal will be to recapture the feeling of "social comfort" in Monticello's original sitting room. Early letters confirm this ideal of informal sociability, but missing from this record is an acknowledgment of the enslaved house servants who made this leisure possible by serving food, cleaning and stocking wood.



Historical evidence shows that a German iron stove once occupied a corner niche, radiating heat that made it possible to gather in this room year-round. Made using the detailed invoice from the forge where it was manufactured, a reproduction of the stove will return to its original location.

This project will restore Jefferson's

idealized vision of a sitting room, telling the stories of some of the individuals who relaxed — or labored — here. Within this "small apartment," his guests would be challenged and edified through sociable dialogue. The Tea Room project is an opportunity to recirculate the lessons Jefferson found so important, and to circulate new lessons learned.

## A Purpose Restored

Revelations about Jefferson's decorative scheme in the Tea Room will enable curators to closely re-create the retired statesman's art installation. Scientific analysis of the walls and original plaster brackets, as well as busts held in other collections, reveals that the sculpture and supports were painted a terra cotta color, not white, and were backed by stone-gray painted walls. This color scheme, evoking antiquity, will serve as a

backdrop for the reinstallation of Jefferson's art. Medals and prints dotted the walls beneath each bracket, conveying highlights of Jefferson's political career. The theme of virtue versus vice was cleverly incorporated by juxtaposing portraits of worthy men such as the Marquis de Lafayette with medallions of despots like Emperor Nero, which were hung on hooks attached to each of the sculpture brackets.



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