

Be Inspired

Nearly 27 million people have visited Monticello since Thomas Jefferson's iconic home was opened to guests in 1923. They come to learn about Jefferson, the power of ideas, architecture, agriculture, and the lives of the enslaved people who lived and labored here. They come to be inspired.

Here are just a few of those who have found inspiration at Monticello:



DAVID MCCULLOUGH | A Historian Is Born

When renowned historian David McCullough was 15 years old, he took a spring vacation trip from his hometown of Pittsburgh, stopping first at Monticello, then at Williamsburg and finally at Gettysburg. That journey planted the seeds for his lifelong fascination with the past — one that has resulted in two Pulitzer Prizes, two National Book Awards and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award.

“My whole life's interest in history began at Monticello. I'll never forget it. I went back home and decided I was going to keep a diary every day about the weather, just as Thomas Jefferson did. I think I did it for maybe four days. But what really got me was the idea that this man could also design the magnificent architecture at the University of Virginia — the Lawn and the Rotunda. And he was president and had this infinitely adventurous scientific mind. You didn't have to just be interested in art or music or science or chemistry — you could be interested in all of it.”



JABARI JEFFERSON | Powerful Connections

Jabari Jefferson is a descendant of the enslaved Granger, Hemings and Evans families of Monticello. A mixed-media artist based in Washington, D.C., Jefferson has created “The Library Series,” which is dedicated to the pursuit of understanding who we are and interpreting the world around us. The series draws on the influence of his father, a librarian at the Library of Congress, and his grandfather, a retired archivist for the National Archives.

“My experience visiting Monticello the first time was very inspiring, once I overcame the initial rage of the historical reality of the situation. When I allowed myself a more mature interpretation of the minds and efforts of those who physically built the geometry, vision and prestige of Monticello, I was then granted inspiration.

My inspiration led to admiration, respect and gratitude for the DNA, instinct and abilities that flow through my veins. I felt honored to know the caliber of skill sets, trades, cultures and lifestyle of the enslaved black and brown builders of the property. Through personal research, I was able to fully appreciate the forever brilliance of black and brown people.”



Eric Plasercki

GIL SCHAFER | Testing Limits

Gil Schafer III is an award-winning architect and a member of Monticello's board of trustees. He is consistently recognized as a leading practitioner of contemporary classical architecture. A member of *Architectural Digest's* AD100, and a winner of *Veranda's* Art of Design Award and the 2019 Arthur Ross Award in Architecture, he is the author of *The Great American House* and *A Place to Call Home*.

“Jefferson’s endlessly creative mind is inspiring for many reasons, but to me — as an architect — what I find so compelling about Monticello is the degree to which Jefferson used his home as a laboratory for exploring ideas. He seemed fearless in his willingness to try new things there, to rethink original strategies, to experiment. For anyone in a creative field, Jefferson’s curiosity and tenacious pursuit of the better solution is a lesson in not settling — in always pushing oneself to go further.”



Wine & Country Life

IRA WALLACE | Digging Deeper

A co-founder of Monticello’s Heritage Harvest Festival, Ira Wallace is a seed saver, educator and master gardener, and the driving force behind Southern Exposure Seed Exchange — one of the country’s top sources for heirloom and open-pollinated seeds. She is the author of *The Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast*.

“Monticello’s beautiful grounds and Jefferson’s detailed garden journals inspired me to propose a collaboration between Southern Exposure Seed Exchange and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants to create the first Heritage Harvest Festival, a fun, family-oriented, educational event promoting sustainable gardening, seed saving and the preservation of heirloom plants. Also, seeing tours and interpretations expand to include the whole plantation community, bringing in the stories of the enslaved African people who lived and worked at Monticello, has inspired me to dig deep and bring more stories of the gardeners and foods from the African diaspora into my work.”



Visit Monticello and be inspired by the skill and resilience of the enslaved people who lived and labored here.

In Monticello's kitchens, you'll learn about the stories of skilled chefs like Peter and James Hemings, Edith Fossett and Ursula Granger.



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“As we build a better future, we should also learn from the past. As a chef, I am fascinated by the way food often tells the forgotten stories of those who came before us — people who brought the best of the world to the heart of America.

Monticello doesn't just tell a story about chefs or about ancient history. It's a story about how this country, its past and its future, is built by people whose own stories have been ignored for too long.”

— *Chef José Andrés*



Spanish-American chef José Andrés is an internationally recognized culinary innovator, a *New York Times* bestselling author and a dedicated philanthropist. His nonprofit, World Central Kitchen, delivers food relief in the wake of natural and humanitarian disasters and has served more than 100 million meals worldwide. Andrés spoke at Monticello's Independence Day Celebration in 2020.