

Reflections *on* Monticello

Monticello's latest book, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello: Architecture, Landscape, Collections, Books, Food, Wine*, offers a fresh, modern perspective on Jefferson's contributions to the arts. Featuring essays from nine acclaimed arts and culture luminaries and photography by Miguel Flores-Vianna, this book pays homage to Jefferson, citing his work at Monticello as a testament to his genius in art, culture and science.

For a sneak peak, here are excerpts from and accompanying photos for two of the essays found in the book.

“A Mirror to the World” by Xavier Salomon

In his essay, Xavier Salomon, deputy director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator at The Frick Collection, explores the collections at Monticello. Jefferson's taste was at once eclectic, practical and sophisticated. The amalgamation of disparate objects mirrors the relentless curiosity of their owner and is the fundamental characteristic of Jefferson's collecting, which went hand in hand with his desire to educate and advance the citizens of his country.



There was a variety of mirrors in a number of rooms at Monticello, and while some came from France, others were acquired or framed in America. Jefferson's large pier mirrors reflect Monticello's spacious Parlor – its furniture, paintings, and musical instruments – as well as the landscape outside the west garden front, including the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The mirrors covered empty niches that were vestiges of Jefferson's first version of Monticello – intended for copies of classical sculptures. This simple wall divided by a door embodies important aspects of Jefferson as a collector. The ambitious Virginia politician and scholar was enamored with antiquity and created a building and its contents based on the translation of edifices and sculptures he knew only through books. In the same

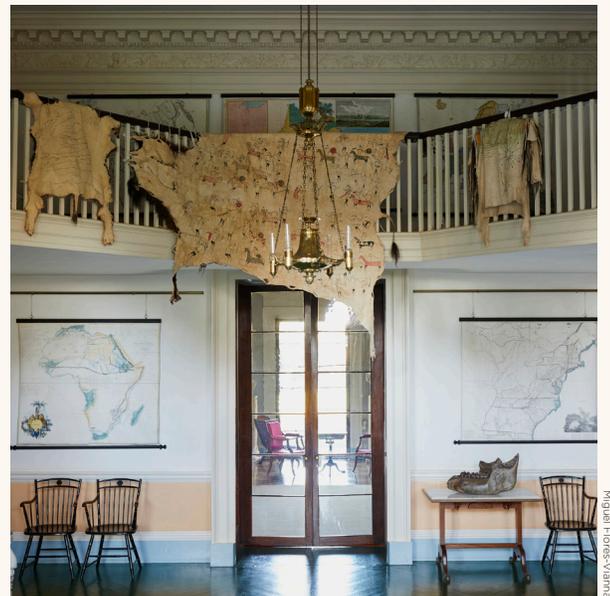
Above one of the two monumental pier mirrors flanking the Parlor entrance, Jefferson hung portraits of the three men he believed to be the “greatest” who “have ever lived”: Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and John Locke.



Miguel Flores-Vilanna

The Hall displays Jefferson's collections of sculptures, maps, Native American artifacts and natural history specimens, crowned by the Great Clock over the entry.

way in which Monticello was the result of Jefferson's knowledge of Palladian architecture through the volumes of his library, the sculptures he originally envisioned for his house were copies of celebrated classical antiquities that he never saw, such as the Apollo Belvedere and the Farnese Hercules. The list of sculptures he wanted for Monticello, as documented around 1771, was entirely based on second-hand knowledge, mainly on Joseph Spence's *Polymetis*, first published in 1747. However, the Jefferson who returned to Virginia in 1789, after five years in France with sojourns to Italy and England, was the founding father who, more than any other, had engaged with the culture and arts of what he defined as the United States' "transatlantic brethren." He changed the architecture at Monticello substantially, but he also, over the years, moved many objects and artworks in and out of the house and among its various rooms. The mirrors at Monticello reflect their ever-shifting surroundings and echo through their surfaces the art and nature within and around the home. The house itself mirrors Jefferson's curiosity and myriad interests, as well as his incessant pursuit of knowledge and his ambition to advance culture in the fledgling nation he had been instrumental in creating.



Miguel Flores-Vilanna

In the Hall, Jefferson's guests were greeted with rare and extraordinary artifacts, such as the painted Mandan buffalo robe depicting an important battle between the Mandan and the Sioux and the Arikara peoples.

“As Far as the Eye Could See” by Thomas Woltz

Renowned landscape architect Thomas Woltz explores how Monticello’s composition of farm, forest, gardens and grounds stands as an extraordinary example of comprehensive landscape design, perhaps the first of its scale and complexity in American history.



Miguel Flores-Vianna

Originally a 5,000-acre plantation (of which 2,600 acres remain generally intact), the composition emerged from the European concept of *ferme ornée*, or ornamental farm, which combined productive agriculture, enhancement of the natural context, bold reshaping of existing topographic features, and expansive collections of both native and non-native plants for pleasure and production. For his buildings and landscapes at Monticello, Jefferson drew directly from ancient, Renaissance, and Enlightenment design concepts. The landscape design evolved in tandem with his vision for democracy and pluralism in the society of ideas that he was striving to create. The social experiment of American democracy relied upon the design of structures that created an orderly balance between the natural impulses of humankind and the regulations of collective self-governance. In Jefferson’s comprehensive vision for Monticello, we find a similar balance between the expressive forces of nature and the discipline of landscape design.

Jefferson began planning and shaping this landscape after he took possession of his inheritance upon reaching majority at age twenty-one. But he had been thinking about its design much earlier. As a boy he had roamed the hill overlooking his family home and vowed to someday build his house atop it. He later named his new home and the entire plantation for this defining feature: Monticello, Italian for “little mountain.” The siting of his house on a mountaintop

Jefferson’s first land acquisition, secured in 1771 to protect his scenic views, was the higher mountain south of Monticello, which he named Montalto, or “high mountain.” As seen from the roof of the house, Montalto rises 410 feet above Monticello, with an elevation of 1,278 feet.

greatly increased the difficulty of construction and ongoing provisioning, while reducing access to water. In perhaps his boldest design stroke, Jefferson ordered the crown of the mountain sliced away; tons of earth were displaced by enslaved laborers working with the aid of animals. As Andrea Wulf has noted: “Instead of rich yields and easy access to Richmond and Fredericksburg, Jefferson had chosen glorious views over the seemingly endless lines of the Blue Ridge Mountains that stood as the western signposts for the wilderness beyond.” The nearly three-acre plateau created on the top of the mountain became the canvas upon which Jefferson would situate the roads, orchards, terraces, and gardens, both ornamental and productive, that would form the framework of his landscape design.

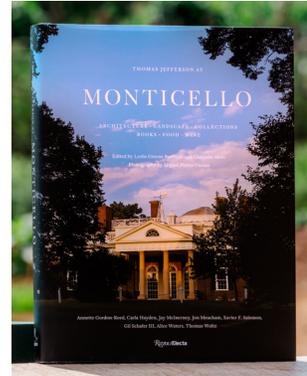


Miguel Flores-Vianna

Jefferson installed his weather vane atop the roof of the Northeast Portico. It was connected to a compass rose directly below on the portico's ceiling so he could easily monitor wind direction with a glance through the glass doors of the Hall.

BRING MONTICELLO HOME

Released in September 2021, this visually stunning book explores Monticello, both house and plantation, with texts that present a current assessment of Jefferson's cultural contributions to his noteworthy home and the fledgling country.



Purchase your copy from The Shop at Monticello today and enjoy photography and essays from the following notable contributors:

Leslie Greene Bowman (co-editor), president of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello

Charlotte Moss (co-editor), interior designer, author and philanthropist

Miguel Flores-Vianna, photographer and author based in London and New York

Carla Hayden, 14th librarian of Congress

Annette Gordon-Reed, Carl M. Loeb University Professor at Harvard and Pulitzer Prize-winning author

Jay McInerney, author and wine columnist

Jon Meacham, presidential historian, contributing writer to the *New York Times* Book Review, contributing editor at *Time*, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author

Xavier F. Salomon, deputy director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator at The Frick Collection, New York City

Gil Schafer III, award-winning architect

Alice Waters, chef, author, food activist and owner of Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California

Thomas Woltz, owner of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects



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