

COMPLETING THE PICTURE

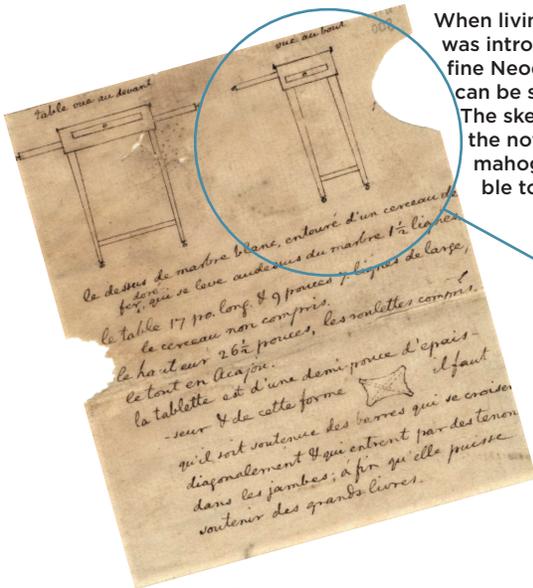
Re-creating Jefferson's Original Furniture

By Diane Ehrenpreis, associate curator of decorative arts

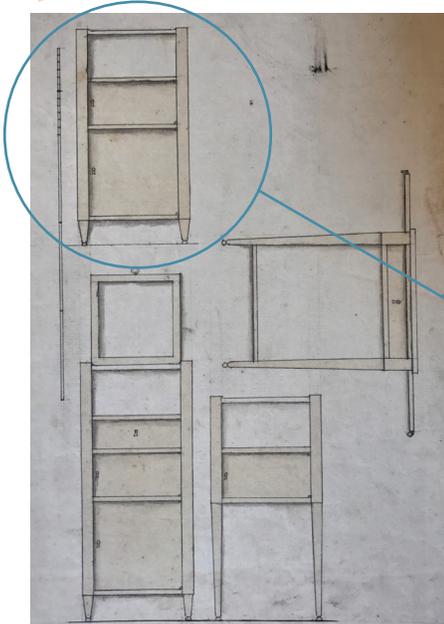
Visitors to Monticello frequently comment on how alive the rooms feel, noting the textiles, paint scheme and furniture. Curators create this sense of vibrancy by filling the rooms with furnishings once used by Jefferson and, when necessary, reproductions based on lost originals. For the missing

night table and washstand in the Private Suite, curators were fortunate to have Jefferson's original commission documents. This type of evidence rarely survives, so with instructions in hand, Monticello researchers and artisans collaborated to reproduce Jefferson's commissions.

When living in Paris in the mid-1780s, Jefferson was introduced to the beauty and convenience of fine Neoclassical furniture. These very attributes can be seen in his commission for a night table. The sketch delineates the style and form, and the notes detail specifics such as dimensions, mahogany as the chosen wood, a banded marble top and brass casters for mobility.



Jefferson specified that there be a shelf a half-inch thick and wrote, "It must be supported by bars which cross diagonally ... so that it can support large books."



A second drawing provides invaluable clues about the missing washstand. Cabinetmaker and collaborator Harrison Higgins of Richmond, Virginia, concurred with Monticello curators that it was drawn by the actual furnituremaker to showcase his work in the way a page from a catalog or website does today. Jefferson's night table is shown on the right, along with three variations of a gentleman's washstand.



Another recent addition to the list of reproductions is a red leather document case, similar to the one on display in Martha Jefferson's bedroom at Monticello.

While it was clear that the same French workshop made a washstand using similar proportions and materials as the night table, it was not clear which washstand was at Monticello. Channeling their inner "Goldilocks," curators determined that one was too big, one was too plain, and one fit the description of "the little low one which Grandpapa used to wash on."

Expertly crafted reproductions of furniture seen at Monticello and the document case are available at monticelloshop.org.