

| on the border |

Presidential Funhouse

Charlottesville's Monticello Showcases Jefferson and His Collection of Curiosities

By Sue Eisenfeld

North America's first-ever storm window. A revolving serving door used to move food from the service area to the dining room. A dumbwaiter tucked into a side pocket of a fireplace mantle to retrieve wine from the cellar. A waffle iron from Holland. New-fangled oil lamps. And an unheard-of private privy. Welcome to the high-tech world of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.

In a time when people rarely ventured past the limited boundaries of the young United States, lived in simple one- or two-room houses and got by with candles and other rudimentary devices, Jefferson built his 33-room home as a "funhouse" of sorts, designed to increase comfort and convenience, to delight and amuse; a museum of creative adaptations, curiosities, and novelties—the best of what North America and Europe had to offer architecturally, artistically and pragmatically.

He displayed a mastodon jaw bone from Big Bone Lick, Ky., in the entrance hall. He grew far-flung Italian vegetables. He installed skylights. Each feature was more unusual than the next—for a visitor in the late 1700s and early 1800s. He wanted to bring new ideas to the new country he helped found.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THOMAS JEFFERSON FOUNDATION.



The average person, as well as the ultra-elite who made up the bulk of Jefferson's visitors, would have been equally star-struck by the number of unusual features Jefferson displayed. One guest noted that Jefferson was fond of "little mechanical inventions," such as his turning "clothes horse" on which he



Monticello's decorative moldings and octagonal rooms reflect Jefferson's admiration for the classic architecture of Europe.

hung his wardrobe, his self-operating double doors, his triple-sash windows and his Great Clock and gong.

The Monticello of today is the second iteration of a house Jefferson first built from 1769 to 1784 and then rebuilt from 1796 to 1809 following his five-year trip to Paris as minister to France. Its design is based largely on Italian architect Andrea Palladio's rules of classical architecture, using octagonal rooms, arches and a variety of decorative moldings. Following his tenure in Europe, Jefferson tore down the roof and added a dome, removed walls and built dozens of new rooms, and filled the mansion with unique architectural details, objects and furnishings that were inspired by the buildings he had seen overseas.

In addition to being the author of the Declaration of Independence, the first U.S. Secretary of State, the nation's third



Abundant windows and open-air porticos and walkways enabled Jefferson to enjoy the beautiful gardens he so treasured.

president, the broker of the Louisiana Purchase, the commissioner of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the founder of the University of Virginia, Jefferson also considered himself a scientist, gardener and farmer, and his proclivity to import, experiment, and improve continued in these endeavors as well.

His flower garden showcased 105 species of North American wildflowers (some of which were collected by Lewis and Clark) and reflected his interest in the design of informal English gardens he had seen while traveling abroad. Jefferson's "pet trees," as one friend called them, numbered 160 species. The vegetable garden was his testing ground for more than 250 varieties of everything

from French artichokes to Mexican peppers to 15 types of English peas. And his "fruitery" featured 150 varieties of 31 types of fruit—including his famous figs, three varieties of cider apples and French apricots. Monticello grew the greatest assemblage of edible plants in the nation.

Monticello tells the story of a man, as well as the story of a house. It gives visitors a glimpse into Jefferson's mind, showing us the value he placed on education, exploration and discovery; cross-cultural appreciation; engagement with the landscape, plants and soil; and the never-ending thrill of curiosity and imagination. ✦

IF YOU GO

MORE ABOUT MONTICELLO

Monticello offers several types of tours—and it's possible (and worth it) to do several in a day:

- **HOUSE TOUR** (first-floor guided tour offered throughout the day; requires reservations): \$22 (March to October) and \$17 (November to February) for adults or \$8 for kids year-round.
- **BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOUR** (second- and third-floor guided tour, which includes tickets for the House Tour; 10:30 a.m., 11 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.; requires reservations): \$37.
- **SIGNATURE TOURS** (smaller groups; most Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, May to September, 6:15 p.m. and 6:45 p.m.; requires reservations): \$45.
- **GARDENS AND GROUNDS TOUR** (April to October, every hour from 10:15 a.m. to 5:15 p.m., no reservations): included with admission to house tour and behind-the-scenes tour.
- **PLANTATION COMMUNITY TOUR** (April to October, every hour on the hour from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., no reservations): included with admission to house tour and behind-the-scenes tour.

HOURS OF OPERATION:
9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

WEB SITE:
www.monticello.org

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GENERAL INFORMATION:
434.984.9822

GROUP TOURS:
434.984.9880