



Federal Furniture

Michael Dunbar

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Federal furniture first emerged in the late 18th century, at about the same time as the American Revolution and the beginning of the Federal Republic. This furniture was dramatically different in design from what preceded it - light and graceful, yet remarkably sturdy. It reflected the spirit of a people who had just undertaken one of the most radical political experiments in history. This is a book about that furniture. It is a complete workshop in the design and construction of selected Federal-period pieces, written by a craftsman who knows the subject as few others do. Woodworker Michael Dunbar lives in a faithfully restored Federal-period home filled entirely with furniture of the period. He also makes Federal furniture for a living, using 18th-century methods and tools. In this book he shares what he has learned about how and why the furniture was made, how people lived with it two centuries ago, and how he lives with it today. For readers interested in reproducing the furniture, Dunbar examines 20 individual pieces from his own collection, including a card table, Pembroke table, candlestand, secretary, Hepplewhite and Windsor chairs, desk on frame, chest of drawers, bellows, and high-post bed, providing a complete set of measured drawings for each and plenty of practical construction information. Dunbar also discusses one design element or technique about each piece that is uniquely Federal - how to hand-carve spiral turnings on a mirror, reproduce the simulated cock beading on a drawer front, or hand-shape the seat of a Windsor chair, for example. He includes detailed photographs, isometric drawings and step-by-step instructions to help woodworkers reproduce these features authentically. It all adds up to a fascinating workshop in traditional woodworking, for furniture makers, collectors, historians and others interested in learning about the hallmarks of Federal furniture and its construction and use in Federal period life.

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