

The Museum of the City of New York  
Frederick A. O. Schwarz Children's Center



## EDUCATOR GUIDE:

### *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*

*New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* features furniture and decorative arts made or designed in New York from the late 17<sup>th</sup> through the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. On display are objects that illuminate aspects of daily life including recreational pursuits and various domestic technologies.

## **Introduction**

This guide is intended to be used as a resource for teachers visiting the Museum of the City of New York's *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* exhibition during self-guided gallery visits.

The information and activities in this guide may be taught before, during, and/or after a self guided visit to the Museum. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the information to the grade level and ability of their students. For further information or to schedule a self-guided visit to the Museum of the City of New York, please contact the Frederick A.O. Schwarz Children's Center at (212) 534-1672, ext. 3334 or [schoolprograms@mcny.org](mailto:schoolprograms@mcny.org).

### **Included in this guide:**

- **Curriculum connections**
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*Disclaimer: Please note that certain objects may be absent from the exhibition on the day of your visit. Museum objects are frequently removed for care and cleaning. We apologize for any inconvenience.*

## Curriculum Connections

Educational activities in the *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* exhibition connect to your school curriculum in the following ways:

- **Visual Literacy and the Arts**  
Students learn to identify and interpret visual elements in material culture and design through guided observation and reflective analysis of objects on display in the exhibition.
- **Social Studies**  
Students use objects to explore an interior's original context and time period. Students develop skills in historical analysis while making meaningful connections to important people, places, and events along a timeline of New York City history.
- **English Language Arts & Literacy**  
Students develop their skills in reading and writing as they respond to the exhibition verbally, in both analytical and creative writing, and in conversation with peers.

## **Background Info:** *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*

This gallery highlights furniture and decorative arts designed and made in New York from the colonial era through the dawn of the 20th century. The six alcoves presented here are arranged chronologically, reflecting changes over time in style, means of production, and the city's growing wealth.

This exploration of the evolution of New York interior design begins with the heavily Dutch-influenced furniture found in the city in the early colonial period. During the subsequent height of English influence, just prior to the Revolutionary War, elements unique to New York furniture began to emerge. The early years of the new American republic saw the New York area become the nation's leading region for furniture design and production. During the "Gilded Age," from the post-Civil War years to the end of the 19th century, New York interiors and furnishings rivaled their European counterparts.

The architectural features used in each of the alcoves do not necessarily replicate actual interiors, but rather constitute historically appropriate backdrops, incorporating materials and color schemes used in rooms like ones that once housed the furnishings on display. As such, they serve to showcase some of the highlights of the Museum of the City of New York's rich and varied furniture and decorative arts collections.

### **THE DUTCH ALCOVE**

Although the design of buildings, furniture, and household objects changes over time, the past can also command a long reach. Indeed, long after the social and political contexts that fostered a particular way of life have changed, the built environment and the world of design may continue to reflect the vanished conditions. For nearly 40 years, from 1625 to 1664, what is today New York was part of the Dutch colony of New Netherland. New York City began as New Amsterdam, located at the southern tip of Manhattan. In 1664, New York became an English colony and the Dutch would never again play the dominant role in the city's politics and economic fortunes. Yet, as late as the second decade of the 18th century, Dutch stylistic influences continued to hold sway.

This alcove, intended to suggest an interior of a prosperous New York household, ca. 1680-1710, shows the Dutch influence in its beamed ceiling, whitewashed walls, tiles imported from Delft, Holland, and double or Dutch door. Though such features would have been typical for the time period, the placement of the door, casement window, and large fireplace does not replicate an actual interior.

The large pieces of furniture seen here, produced by leading local craftsmen, most of whose identities are now unknown, represent the height of work produced in New York in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The large cabinet (or *kas* as the Dutch called it), with projecting ebonized panels resting atop bulbous feet, would have been common, while the elaborately inlaid piece of furniture placed against the rear wall—a "fall-front" desk, in which a central panel folds down to serve as a writing surface—is extremely rare. In addition to owning New York-made objects, early New Yorkers of means also purchased imported goods. The blue-and-white ceramics seen here came from Holland; the clock and linen press are most likely of Dutch origin as well.

### **CHERRY STREET ALCOVE**

Immigrants and other settlers traveling far from home often bring the architecture and design of their place of origin with them. This is particularly true in regard to domestic environments, where a sense of comfort, of being "home," is strongly based on visual associations. Not surprisingly, early New

York interiors strongly reflected Dutch influence. By the third quarter of the 18th century, however, when New York had been a British possession for close to a century, residents increasingly looked elsewhere, and particularly to London, for inspiration. The most important English cabinetmaker of the period was Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779), whose name has become synonymous with Rococo design, and whose influence can be seen here in furniture and decorative art objects manufactured in New York during the height of the American Rococo period, ca. 1750-75.

The architectural elements (ca. 1760) that form this alcove come from an informal parlor in a house that once stood at 29 Cherry Street. The paneling is typical of the period; it is coupled with a segment of the original room's fireplace wall, complete with a fire surround fashioned with tiles imported from Delft, Holland, along with 18th-century painted wallpaper.

The pieces placed within this architectural setting are among the most sophisticated work produced by New York furniture makers, many of whose names remain unknown. Fabricated virtually on the eve of the American Revolution, the sophisticated and refined furniture seen here is for the most part made of imported mahogany. The sinuous cabriole legs terminate in so-called ball-and-claw feet, an element inspired by Chinese imagery of a dragon grasping a pearl. The highly reticulated claw and the scalloped edge found on the lower edge of the chairs and cabinetry is typical of high-style New York-made furniture of the period.

### **BENKARD ALCOVE**

Immigrants have long played key roles in shaping the city's character and, during the early 19th century, two of the city's chief tastemakers hailed from other countries. Duncan Phyfe (1768-1854), born in Scotland, and Charles-Honoré Lannuier (1779-1819), born in France, became America's leading cabinetmakers and brought distinctive European-based classical styles to New York. Designs by both cabinet-makers demonstrated the influence of English furniture designer Thomas Sheraton (1751-1806). Lannuier and the prolific Phyfe employed and interpreted a variety of English- and French-originated vocabularies, often incorporating decorative features derived from ancient Greek and Roman precedents. Their careers set new standards of excellence for American-made furniture and furthered New York's status as a design center.

The Sheraton-inspired bedroom furniture seen here represents the pinnacle of taste and sophistication in American furniture of the era. The furniture is distinguished by such neoclassical features as round tapered fluted legs and, most notably, in a vast departure from pre-Revolutionary War designs, visually and physically lighter rectilinear forms.

Bertha King Benkard used the 18th-century wood paneling, found on Long Island, in her 20th-century residence. Following historical precedent, she used period English Indian Red transfer-printed tiles to form the fire surround. Among Mrs. Benkard's many significant gifts to the Museum of the City of New York was the gaming table designed by Charles-Honoré Lannuier, seen in the front of this display.

### **WHITNEY ALCOVE**

In the early 19th century, as the citizens of the still-young United States sought to synthesize the democratic ideals of ancient Greece with the republican traditions of ancient Rome, New York furniture makers, who now set the nation's standards of taste and style, turned to the distant past for inspiration. At the same time, increased prosperity allowed New Yorkers to build unprecedentedly

large townhouses containing rooms that were in keeping with the scale of their European equals. Affluent New Yorkers began to fill these generous spaces with furniture and decorative objects designed in the so-called American Classical Style.

The architectural elements installed in this alcove, originally from a home on Washington Square in Greenwich Village, represent the height of the style, ca. 1820-30. The majority of the furniture is from a suite designed by Duncan Phyfe and commissioned in 1827 by Stephen Whitney, one of New York's leading merchants, for the drawing room of his home at 7 Bowling Green, where the former United States Custom House (Cass Gilbert, 1907) now stands. Elements derived from classical sources embellish the furnishing, including columns and acanthus leaves. The focal point of this alcove, as was typical of fashionable drawing rooms during this period, is the center table. In an extraordinarily rare application, Phyfe decorated the table top with a medallion in true fresco depicting the ancient Roman patriot Mettius Curtius, who sacrificed himself for the good of the state, a sentiment that underscored the patriotic ideals of the new American republic.

### **PIERREPONT ALCOVE**

Throughout the 19th century, American architects and designers looked to the European past for inspiration, even as the country's sense of having its own national identity and culture grew stronger. In the third quarter of the century, Renaissance Revival became the style of choice for fashionable New York homes. Rather than copying Renaissance furniture directly, makers adapted varied architectural forms to adorn everything from candlesticks to cabinets. The sofa and two chairs on view here belong to a suite of furniture by New York-based Leon Marcotte & Company that was awarded first prize in 1876 at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the first world's fair to be held in the United States. The achievement of an American furniture company being awarded first prize demonstrated that the United States, and specifically New York, was now recognized as a leader in design and manufacturing.

The window wall and ceiling of this alcove come from 1 Pierrepont Place in Brooklyn, the home of Henry E. Pierrepont (1808-88); they were designed in 1856 by the English-born architect Richard Upjohn (1802-78), who immigrated to New York. In addition to designing Trinity Church (1839-46) in lower Manhattan in the 1860s, he was responsible for the imposing North Gate and Pierrepont Family Tomb in Brooklyn's Green-Wood Cemetery. It is likely that Upjohn was assisted in the design of the cornices, mirror, and pier or console table by Gustave Herter (1830-98), who would become one of New York's leading furniture makers.

### **FLAGLER ALCOVE**

The drawing room in Anne and Harry Harkness Flagler's 1868 town house at 32 Park Avenue, a portion of which is seen here, demonstrated that in the hands of a skillful designer, a highly refined vocabulary could be used to reflect the personal interests and tastes of the clients. In 1902 the Flaglers purchased the house, designed by renowned New York architect Richard Morris Hunt (1830-98). Three years later, the couple commissioned Willard Parker Little of Little & O'Connor to remodel their residence.

Acknowledging the broad artistic interests of his clients, ranging from symphonic music to 18th-century American antiques and art objects from other cultures, Little drew on numerous historical sources to create an environment that celebrated the Flaglers' diverse tastes. Inspiration for the drawing room came from the Italian Renaissance Sala Della Zodiaco in the Ducal Palace at Mantua,

Italy. The ceiling was copied from a Venetian ecclesiastical building, while the doors and over-mantel are based on Classical mythology. American artist Bryson Burroughs painted the Legend of Cupid and Psyche cycle in the panels of the gilt mahogany doors; his painting *The Elysian Fields* is on canvas set above the mantel. The furniture, probably also designed by Little, was inspired by the work of the 18th-century English architect and designer Robert Adam. Inset into the backs of the chairs and settee are painted medallions depicting mythological subjects.

In the 20th century, New York would continue to be a center of activity for domestic architecture and interior design. Though the furniture manufacturing industry largely left the area in the decades after World War II, New York maintains a leadership role in interior tastemaking to this day.

## Suggested Activities

The following activities may be completed before, during, and/or after a self guided visit to the *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* exhibition.

### 1. Create a Timeline

*New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* includes six decorative arts environments, presented in chronological order, from the 17<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Create a timeline, beginning in 1609 with Hudson’s exploration of Manhattan Island through 1909 when the Wright Brothers pilot the first airplane to fly over New York Harbor. As a class, brainstorm historic New York events and people to plot along the timeline. Consider including notable social, political, and economic movements, inventions, and other events of interest. Then, note the dates associated with each of the alcoves and plot them on the timeline. Discuss their historical contexts, imagining what events may have been discussed in rooms and houses like them during their particular era.

### 2. Design a New York Interior for 2010

The alcoves that comprise *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* present original furniture, household items, and decorative arts from more than two centuries of New York City inhabitants. Encourage students to be their own curators and challenge them to propose a recreated interior for today, one that displays their favorite contemporary design styles or household décor. Students may do this by creating a list of items they would include in a museum exhibition such as the *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*, as well as writing label text explaining their choices. They may also create a mixed-media visual representation or 3D model of their idea using sketching, photographs, or collaged newspaper and magazine cut-outs. These imagined interiors should convey a message about interior design and functionality in the 21st century or in their own lives. (Extension: Some interiors display paintings of notable New Yorkers, conveying a message about their household residents’ political beliefs and affiliations. Consider how objects, posters, and personal possessions in this imagined interior could tell a similar story about 2010.)

### 3. Write a Narrative

Pretend each alcove is a stage set for a play and let it be your inspiration! Have students work in small groups to record an interior’s furniture pieces and décor, as well as its original address (if provided) and time period. Students will then research the alcove’s historical context and create imagined characters to interact within the space. Students may then perform their period drama for the class. After the performance, actors may field questions during a “talk-back” discussion with the audience to explain their research and writing process.

### 4. Find Similarities and Differences

Challenge students to look for similarities among the alcoves. What commonalities can they find? (Hint: Think about lighting, work space, etc.) Once students make a list of things that are the same, encourage them to note the many differences they find. For example, note the difference in interior lighting among the rooms and ask why that technology changes. What about floor and ceiling treatments? Seating options? Why might these approaches and styles change so dramatically over 400 years of design and invention?

## Key Terms

Students may benefit from an introduction to the following terms and influential individuals that relate to *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*.

### Terms:

- Colony/Colonial
- Design
- Immigration
- Influence
- Interior
- Form
- Function
- Style/Stylized
- Dutch
- English
- American Revolution
- Federal and Republican
- Gilded Age

### Furniture styles:

- Classical/American Classical /Neo-Classical
- Renaissance Revival
- Empire
- Federal

### Notable designers and artists:

- Duncan Phyfe
- Thomas Sheraton
- Charles Honore Lannuier
- Leon Marcotte & Company

### Relevant New Yorkers:

- DeWitt Clinton
- Robert Fulton
- Whitehead Hicks
- Mayor George Clinton
- Henry E. Pierrepont

### Timeline:

- Ca. 1600- 1725: Baroque period, subdivided into ca. 1610-1675 Dutch period; ca. 1700-25 William & Mary
- Ca. 1725-80: Rococo period, subdivision within ca.1725-50 Queen Anne; ca. 1750-80 Chippendale
- Ca. 1780-1830: Classical or Neo-Classical period, subdivision within Federal ca. 1780-1810; Empire ca. 1800-30
- Ca. 1830 – 50: Restoration period

- Ca. 1840 – 60: Gothic Revival
- Ca. 1845 – 70: Rococo Revival
- Ca. 1860 – 80: Renaissance Revival
- Ca. 1870-1910: Gilded Age subdivision within ca. 1870-80 Modern Gothic, Eastlake or Venetian Gothic; ca. 1880-1900 Aesthetic movement; ca. 1880-1910 Beaux Arts
- Ca. 1890-1920: Art Nouveau
- Ca. 1890 – 1930: Arts & Crafts movement
- Ca. 1920-30: Art Deco or Art Modern

## Resources and Suggested Reading (As of May 2010)

- Fairbanks, Jonathan. *American Furniture: 1620 to the Present*. 1987.
- *A Brief History of American Furniture Styles*, Society of American Period Furniture Makers, official website: <http://www.sapfm.org/timeline.php>
- *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, MET Museum, Department of American Decorative Arts, official website: [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te\\_index.asp?s=all&t=all&d=american\\_decorative\\_arts](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te_index.asp?s=all&t=all&d=american_decorative_arts)

## Sample Gallery Visit Lesson Plan for Elementary Audiences

### Interiors: A Window into New York's Past

**Time:** 1 hour

-Approximately 5 minutes per interior (30 minutes of guided tour)

-30 minutes for activity

#### **Lesson Goals:**

- Students will view examples of home design and decorative arts within settings that invoke New York City residences between 1609 and 1906.
- Students will explore how furniture design and technology in the home progressed between 1609 and 1906.
- Students will reflect on how personal objects tell stories through their form and function.

#### **Lesson Objectives:**

- Students will be able to identify significant differences among the alcoves by comparing changes in material style, form, and function within them.
- Students will use objects within each interior to illustrate the alcove's historical context.
- Students will use the exhibition to reflect on the ways in which objects tell stories about their owners and relate this understanding to objects that they own or use today.

#### **Materials: (Optional)**

- Clipboards
- Pencils
- Sketch paper

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#### **Educator's Note and Introduction:**

This lesson plan is designed to guide educators and students through an exercise in careful looking and object identification. Each "stop," or alcove, includes notes on select objects. Discussion at each stop need not be limited to the objects noted below; they exist merely as prompts to encourage critical thinking and personal connections. Good introductory questions to ask at every stop include: *What do you see inside this space? How might that object have been used? What might that object tell us about the person who owned and/or used it? Based on the answers to these questions, can you figure out what time period this room depicts?*

(Please refer to label text and this guide's "Background Information" section for additional resources and support.)

### **Stop 1: Dutch Alcove (c. 1680-1710)**

- The name of this interior is the Dutch Alcove. The Dutch were the first Europeans to colonize Manhattan Island. Let's look inside this room – *how would it have been lighted?* (Hint: look at the ceiling as well as the entranceway.) *In addition to letting sunlight into a room, why might this split or “Double Dutch Door” be a useful design component?*
- Notice that the standing cabinet (kas), chest, desk (secretary), and hanging cabinet all lock – *why might this be?*
- The wooden floors would take heavy scrubbing with harsh lye soap to keep clean – *how might this explain the bulbous ball feet on many of the furniture pieces?*
- Delft tiles surround the fire place, protecting the wooden house from accidental fire. *How do these “useful” objects also add a decorative element to the room?*
- The figure in the portrait, presumably the head of this household, is painted holding a writing quill and wearing fine clothes. *What might this clue, including the locked secretary desk and bible box above, tell us about his level of class or education? Can you think of any jobs that merchants or employees working for the Dutch West India Trading Company might have held that required this level of education?*
- The head of the house also enjoys the best seat in the house – *can you find the specially-carved rings on the chair's arms? How might this unique design have been accomplished?*

#### **Furniture/Objects:**

**Kas:** A type of large cabinet that originated in Holland with the American version primarily found in the New York area. It was used for general storage, usually of some value as portions could be locked.

**Secretary:** A tall desk with a front panel that opens to create a writing surface. Inside are numerous small drawers, cupboards, shelves and slots-- many of which locked or concealed for security.

**Linen Press:** Flat linens could be moistened, folded, and placed in this device to press. Later the term is used for a cabinet to store linens.

**Tankard:** A covered mug fabricated out of ceramic, glass, pewter, or silver and traditionally used to drink fermented beverages such as beer, ale, or hard cider. Colonial New York had few sources for fresh drinking water; one way to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases was to drink fermented beverages. In America during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, tankards were often kept in local taverns solely for their owner's use, thus the need for engraved initials or coats of arms.

### **Stop 2: Cherry Street Alcove (c. 1750 – 1780)**

- Many New York merchants had strong ties to the British economy, causing the colonial city to divide over the decision to launch the American Revolution. As you view this interior—a room designed for entertainment and social gatherings—imagine the conversations that might have taken place in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. *What issues might have been discussed?*
- The wallpaper displays themes and colors commonly found in Chinese art – *why might a home in the colony of New York be decorated with Chinese wallpaper?* (Hint: The British Empire had trading ports around the world!)
- Although the British took control of the colony from the Dutch in 1664, evidence of Dutch influence remains in this interior. *What “useful” yet “decorative” objects do you recognize that were present in the Dutch interior as well? What were they called?*

- The label text tells us that the five-legged table was used as a card or gaming table. *If this is a gaming table, what might the carved dips and indentations on its surface have been used for?*
- This interior displays a silver coffee pot. As coffee became a socially acceptable drink and form of protest against the British tea tax in the late 1760s, fashionable vessels became prevalent for service of this rebellious beverage. *If the residents of this house drink coffee to avoid paying the tea tax imposed on the colonies by the British, do you think they support the King or the colonies' right to independence?*

### **Furniture/Objects:**

**Bureau Desk:** This is a rare form of adapting a low chest of drawers into a desk. The top drawer opens to reveal a writing surface along with slots and compartments for pens, paper, ink wells and materials.

**Card Table:** When not in use the top of the card or game table would fold in half and the gate leg, in this case the fifth leg, would fold against the back of the table. This would allow for the highly portable table to be stored against the wall.

**Three-piece Tea Set:** Tea was a very fashionable drink throughout western European countries and their colonies. The basic set consisted of a pot, sugar bowl or urn, and a cream pitcher or pot. Larger sets could include a waste bowl, hot water kettle, and sugar tongs.

**Coffee Pot:** As coffee became a socially acceptable drink and form of protest against the British tax system in the late 1760's fashionable vessels became prevalent for service of this rebellious beverage.

### **Stop 3: Benkard Alcove (c. 1750)**

- After the American Revolution, New York furniture makers moved away from traditionally British styles, borrowing themes and idea from other countries instead. This room displays a French influence in its style, as well as a move toward more classical shapes and symbols. The two wooden chairs on view were designed specially for New York Mayor George Clinton – *what patriotic “American” symbol can you find carved into them? What ideal does this symbol embody?*
- Near the front of the alcove is another gaming table. This table folds to conserve space, and would be moved aside when not in use. *What about its design makes it easily movable? Do you notice this feature on any other pieces in the room? Why would this be useful?*
- Tables like the one next to the easy chair were used by women to store needles, thread, and other sewing materials. It is smartly designed to slide open and unfold, revealing spacious storage compartments. It is also on wheels. *Why is this design a useful one for a work table?*
- *What Dutch influence remains around the fire place? Why might these tiles have remained so popular?*

### **Furniture:**

**Easy Chair:** These were heavily upholstered chairs that were usually found in informal parlors, or bedchambers. Some examples have reclining backs, but all had high backs with padded sides or “wings” for the ease of reading or doing some hand work. Today this form is called a Wing Chair and is often found in the most formal rooms.

**Dressing Table:** During this period the dressing table usually came with a mirror and was used in a bedchamber for storage and personal grooming.

**Gaming Table:** This is a special form; the entire top lifts off to reveal a backgammon board. On the underside of the top is green felt to accommodate playing cards and games.

**Work Table:** Pieces such as this were made for women to store their needles, thread, yarn, and fabric either in the compartment concealed beneath the top or in the sliding fabric covered basket. The table is also on casters for easy movement.

**Klismos Chair:** This form is based on ancient Greek and Roman chairs. One of the most identifiable features is the back “saber” legs that dramatically curve away from the chair.

#### **Stop 4: Whitney Alcove (c. 1820 – 1830)**

- The United States was still a young nation in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Looking for ways to establish its new identity, American artists and designers borrowed classic styles from the democratic ideals of ancient Greece and republican traditions of ancient Rome. *How are democracies different from monarchies? Why might American designers want to emulate styles from democratic societies? What message does it send about America’s ideals and values?*
- Elements derived from classical sources embellish the furnishings, including columns, lion paw feet, cornucopia, and acanthus leaves. *Can you find any of these elements on the furnishings?*
- Hanging in the room is a portrait of Robert Fulton, New York engineer and inventor of the steam engine. New York, a port city and shipping capitol throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was greatly impacted by this advancement in technology. *How might an inventor, like Robert Fulton, be a source of local and national pride? Can you think of a modern-day equivalent to hanging a portrait of a national hero in one’s home?* (Hint: political leaders, sports figures, commemorative posters)

#### **Furniture:**

**Pier Table:** This is a table that is specifically designed to go between two architectural elements, such as windows, thus spanning the pier that is formed between them.

**Girandole Mirror:** A round mirror indicative of classical furnishings with a convex mirror and various gilt embellishments. Mirrors, in addition to being decorative, were also useful; by reflecting and amplifying light in a room they served an important purpose during a time when illumination sources were low.

**Recamier:** Based on couches found in ancient Greece and Rome, the name is derived from a painting by the French academic painter Jacques Louis David (born 1748, died 1825), *Madame Recamier 1800-02*, which depicts Juliette Récamier seated on a Grecian couch.

**Cellarette:** This literally means a small cellar. Depending on their size, cellarettes could store anywhere from four to ten bottles. They were built with casters for ease of mobility, thus, a cellarette could be moved from the dining room to parlor with little difficulty.

#### **Stop 5: Pierpont Alcove (c. 1870 – 1890)**

- This interior depicts a room in the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is decorated in a style called Renaissance Revival, which adapts architectural elements into adornments.

- *Looking at the furniture for clues, how do you think this room might have been used? How are the windows and furniture pieces different from those observed in the previous four rooms? What, most notably, has changed about them?*
- The sofa and two chairs on view were awarded first prize in the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (the nations' 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party). This being the first world's fair to be held in the United States, the event celebrated innovative inventions and design. *What American symbols can you identify in the design of these pieces? What makes these embellishments "American?"* (Hint: Think of the American flag's design).

**Furniture/Objects:**

**Music Cabinet:** This cabinet was for the storage of sheet music, thus the carvings that allude to musical themes.

**Fruit Stand & Fruit Dishes:** Although called fruit stands and dishes, they functioned as centerpieces on tables or serving pieces and had many uses.

**Stop 6: Flagler Alcove (c. 1905)**

- This interior displays a turn-of-the-century drawing room from the Flagler family's Park Avenue town house. While the personal objects speak to the family's hobbies and world travels, the design and appointments illustrate advancements in technology and comfort. *This interior is outfitted with a revolutionary invention – can you find it? Using your own experience and knowledge as a 21<sup>st</sup> century visitor, what appliances and electronics were invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that use this same technology? How will that impact home life for the majority of New Yorkers?*

**Furniture/Object:**

**Touchier:** Lighting devices such as this date back to ancient times. They were tall standing pieces holding several candles. The pair on view was made after the use of electricity was common in fashionable homes, thus always electrified, unlike the fixtures found in all the other alcoves.

**Activity (Approximately 30 minutes)**

- After touring the alcoves and discussing their architectural elements, variations in design, and historical context, try this sketching activity. As an alternative, explore other activities listed on page 7 of this guide.

**Activity 1:**

- Divide your sketch paper into six sections (divide by folding or drawing boxes/lines).
- Moving in order from left to right, label each box or section with the title of an alcove and its date or period.
- In each box, sketch one object, furniture piece, or element from each room. You may choose to sketch your favorite piece from each, or make it a study in the evolution of design of one particular element (for example, the feet on the furniture in each room, lighting technology, window treatments, etc.). Make your drawing as detailed as you can – this will make your sheet a comprehensive and educational inventory.
- Then, on the back of your sheet, create a label for a contemporary interior (this may be a real or imagined space) and illustrate its modern-day parallel. Specify if your drawing depicts an existing object or one of your own design. This last drawing may be made in the gallery or may be completed outside the Museum, using actual objects for visual reference. Compare the changes in your survey of styles through 400+ years of New York design.

## Discussion Questions for Middle and High School Audiences

The following questions may be used in discussion with students before, during, and/or after a self-guided visit.

1. The Cherry Street label text tells us that “Immigrants and other settlers traveling far from home often bring the architecture and design of their place of origin with them. This,” it continues, “is particularly true in regard to domestic environments, where a sense of comfort, of being “home,” is strongly based on visual association.” In your opinion, which alcoves in *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City* best illustrate this argument? What architecture and design elements can you identify that appear to have been “brought” by immigrants or other settlers?
2. The Pierrepont Alcove includes a sofa and two chairs that were awarded first prize in 1876 at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (the nation’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party). What elements can you identify in these three pieces that evoke uniquely American symbols or styles? Do you think design can reflect a national or cultural identity? List other examples that prove or disprove this point.
3. Reflect upon the fact that each of these alcoves includes art and decorative furniture pieces from merchant or upper class homes. Why might these items, as opposed to those owned and used by working or lower class New Yorkers, remain in such pristine condition? Similarly, why might museums be more likely to own rare or one-of-a-kind pieces in their collections and not possess more common or “everyday” objects?
4. How does viewing these depictions of interiors from New York City’s past make you conscious of the stories our own personal objects, possessions, and material culture tell others about us? Are these stories, when inferred by strangers or outsiders, always accurate? Test this with a simple exercise: show a classmate or friend a personal object of your own. Do not give them any context for this object or explain anything about where you got it, how you use it, or what it is worth to you. Challenge them to use it as a clue to tell a story or make an inference about you. Without your help or input, is the resulting story entirely accurate? Does it fully illustrate you and your life? Why or why not?
5. Work with a partner to brainstorm furnishings in an alcove that you think would accurately portray a “typical” room in a contemporary New York residence. What challenges presented themselves as you attempted this project? How did you and your partner address these? Discuss your process with the whole class and present the results of your work and vision.



# MCNY Investigations

## *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*

Self-guided worksheet for elementary and middle school students

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Today you will explore the exhibition New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City to understand how household objects and decorating styles have changed over time in New York City.*

Choose your favorite interior. Record its name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. In the space below, create a list of the objects you see. (Note: Example below is from the Dutch Interior.)

<b>Name of Object</b>		<b>Probable Use</b>
<u>Split/Double Dutch Door</u>	:	<u>Lets light and air into the house</u>
_____	:	_____
_____	:	_____
_____	:	_____

2. In the box below, sketch your favorite item from your list above. Include as much detail in your drawing as you can.

3. Now, find a similar object in another interior. Compare it: How is this object different from the one you identified above?

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**4. Your Room: 2010**

Choose one object that you own or would like to own and draw it in the box below. Label it and say how it is used today.



Is your object similar to any objects you explored in this exhibition of New York interiors from the past? Explain.

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# MCNY Investigations

## *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*

Self-guided worksheet for high school students

**This worksheet is designed to help you compare and contrast the art and objects on view in the Museum’s permanent exhibition *New York Interiors: Furnishings for the Empire City*. Use the wall text and your own observations to record valuable historic and aesthetic information about the space.**

**Note: Before beginning this activity, walk around the entire gallery and briefly view each interior. Survey the evolution of their styles and notice the major differences between the first, or oldest alcove, and the last, or most recent. Then, choose your favorite interior and complete the activity below.**

Interior’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Period: c. \_\_\_\_\_

1. In the left column below, list furniture, decorations, and other items of interest you see in this interior. In the right column, name its practical function and/or use. (Note: Example below is from the Dutch Interior.)

<b>Name of Object</b>	:	<b>Probable Use</b>
<u>Split/Double Dutch Door</u>	:	<u>Lets light and air into the house</u>
_____	:	_____
_____	:	_____
_____	:	_____

2. You now have an inventory of some objects and how they were used. Choose one of the objects you identified above and take a closer look at its design. Sketch this item in the area below, including as much detail in your drawing as you can. You may also include written descriptions and information to support your drawing. (Hint: What material is it made of? How large or small is it?, etc.)

3. As an added challenge, try to find an object in a different interior that performs a similar job or function to the item you just drew. Compare it: How is this object different from the one you identified above? How many years separate these objects?

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#### 4. Your Room: c. 2010

What might future generations of New Yorkers find interesting about how we decorate our homes today? Choose one object that you own or would like to own and imagine you're looking at it 100 years from now in a museum setting. How does this object illustrate modern day life in New York City? Does it have any similarities to objects included in these historic interiors? Why or why not?

*Draw your object in the box provided and write sample wall text for its use and significance in the space below:*

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