

## The Architectural Restoration

The architectural restoration of Poplar Forest began in 1990 with the formation of a three-part team consisting of professional staff, consulting architects and an advisory panel. The team approach ensured that the project employed the most professional processes and techniques, and the highest level of authenticity. One of their important decisions was to let the process determine the schedule.

Their slow, careful forensic investigation, called “architectural archaeology,” uncovered many physical “truths” that verified or added to the rich documentary record of the house’s construction. The fact that Jefferson was detained in the White House from 1806 to 1809 meant that his detailed letters to the workers, and their return letters, make this one of the most documented early American houses.

The decision to keep the house open for visitors during all phases of the project makes this one of the most exciting house museums to visit. Another unique decision was to restore the house using the same techniques, the same materials and even the same historical sequence of Jefferson’s long initial construction and finishing. Visitors have had the “added value” of seeing a Jeffersonian project unfold as Jefferson himself saw it over a 30-year process.

By restoring the house in this manner we have learned much more about Jefferson the builder, in addition to allowing visitors to experience Jefferson the architect. The decision to leave two rooms in the house in their unfinished state was based on the strong visitor reaction to seeing and learning from the early nineteenth-century construction technology and techniques used by Jefferson and his workers, both free and enslaved. Visitors have learned not only about Jefferson and Poplar Forest, but also how a model restoration project is conducted and achieved.