

Hailey Ellis

Dr. Hergenrather

History of Interiors 1

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The History of the Desk

Furniture is a very important part of our world. We use many types of furniture in all our daily tasks. One of which is the desk which is a framed table structure with a flat top designed for writing, reading, studying, conducting meetings, etc. The very first desks were used for religious use in churches and synagogues. In later years the desk was used for scribes or journalists designed to make their work easier and neater. The diversity in desks from the Middle Ages to the Neoclassical Era varies and has many purposes that all combine to create the desks humans use in homes, offices, colleges, and classrooms in today's time.

The evolution of the desk originated with the Lectern of the Middle Ages and early Christian centuries. It was used in churches for liturgical books such as bibles, missals, and breviaries during religious services. It was used by many different speakers and was sloped to support books or notes (Lucie-Smith, 50). The shape and materials of the lectern have evolved over the years, it is mainly a rectangular wooden shape but can also be found as round and made of other materials such as metal. Some religions even use the lectern as a more colorful decorative piece. It eventually evolved into a mobile structure that used to be moved around a sanctuary as needed. Due to the invention of printing in the Middle Ages, and the use of linen paper for parchment, books were being made smaller and a lectern was no longer needed for large books. Therefore, craftsmen started designing portable desks which evolved into the desks

we have in the modern world (Boger, 16). Lecterns are still used today in churches, conference rooms, schools, etc., Many different patterns are associated depending on culture and use (Britannica, *Lecturn*).

Furthermore, in the Spanish Renaissance, the Varguenos desk was considered the most distinctive piece of furniture. The varqueño is a portable writing desk that has a drop front for reading or writing. Wrought iron mounts and locks provide decoration on the façade. The desk has many small drawers and doors for holding jewels, documents, and other valuables. The drawers and recesses are often inlaid with ivory, silver, or gold and are occasionally stained in bright colors (Britannica, *Varqueno*). The desk was designed to travel with wealthy landowners from city to city because it folded up and was easy to carry (Harwood and May, 145).

Then in the Baroque Louis XIV period, The Mazarin writing desk was created and became very popular. They have a writing surface with drawers for storage around the desk. These desks were made by cabinet makers called ébéniste. They were known for making case furniture which was sometimes painted. Their work was always very detailed and prestigious, typically done on large surfaces such as desks. The Mazarin desk was used during the 1600s by Louis XIV in his study in the north wing of the Château de Versailles. The form is also called a bureau brisé, meaning a "broken desk," because the hinged front half of the flat top can be folded back, or "broken," to reveal a narrow writing surface (Met Museum, *Small desk with folding top*). This desk is a representation of French culture or design and is typically made of oak or pine wood with elaborate designs on the surface. The Mazarin or Bureau desk is still seen today and has evolved into the modern writing desk with storage. (Met Museum, *Small desk with folding top*) (Section F Louis XIV)

The Bernard ii van Risenburgh writing table is a great representation of the Rococo style. Rooms of Rococo style are very elegant, and the Bernard writing table is made of elegance and delicacy. The desk has curves and cabriole legs with leaves and flowers for decoration. This writing table gives the user some clues about how to use it: first, there is an opening in the front that tells where to sit. With this positioning, one finds a pull-out flat writing surface with a leather inset, just below the tabletop. A drawer for storage slides out of one short end, and another flat surface pulls out of the other to create a place to put accessories such as ink and paper (Khan Academy, *Writing Table*). The gilt-bronze gallery emphasizes the serpentine shape of the table's top and prevents papers from sliding off. This desk is from the golden era of French design. This style of the desk was placed in the private rooms of a home (Met Museum, *Writing Table*). This elegance in desks is still seen today and modern versions of the gilt bronze gallery such as molding, have been made to prevent papers from falling off.

During the Neoclassical Era, Jean-Henri Riesener created the drop front secretary desk in 1783 for Marie-Antoinette. The shiny black and gold of the design show elegance and beautiful bronze gilds. The drop front desk typically consisted of interlaced garlands and flowers. Behind the front of the desk are secret hidden drawers as well as drawers that women can lock to hide their valuables. The wood of this desk was typically oak veneered with ebony and 17th-century Japanese lacquer (Lucie -Smith, 115). Another important desk of the Neoclassical era is the roll-top desk created by David Roentgen. The important feature of this desk is it encloses the working surface of the upper part and can be locked (Met Museum, *Rolltop*). The rolltop desk was first introduced into England from France in the late 18th century, the rolltop desk had become a standard piece of office equipment by the end of the 19th century and began to be mass-produced. The roll-top desk often had flower and leaf bouquets twined around a pointed

planting tool along with ribbon-tied pruning knives which is a typical style of Roentgen. The architectural interior of the desk contains pigeonholes and drawers with small, gilded rings (Britannica, *Rolltop*).

The history of the desk is crucial to modern design. The evolution of the desk we know today started with the Lectern used in churches to hold bibles. In the Spanish Renaissance, the *varqueño* was created to be the first portable desk wealthy people used to travel and work in this period. During the Baroque Louis XIV period, the flat top desks with many drawers for storage became very popular. In the Rococo and neoclassical eras, desks became useful but very elegant and detailed. It was an eye-catching piece of furniture to display in a home. The desk is a piece of furniture that has stood the test of time and successfully evolved into the modern desk we use daily.

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