

Chapter 2

Entrepreneurial Efforts in Britain and Elsewhere



2.1 Anonymous, *A Cabinet-Maker in His Office*, oil on canvas, 20 1/8 x 27 1/2 in (52.7 x 70.2 cm), 1770. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In eighteenth-century Britain, the initiatives of a new breed of craftsman–merchant led to a number of successful enterprises in the decorative arts that both competed with continental luxury production and expanded the trade in such goods to include an upwardly mobile middle class. The inherent flexibility of technology and the specialization of labor, together with the ingenuity of entrepreneurs and their recognition of the roles of design and marketing in stimulating desire, combined to make such successes possible. Once again, such efforts required not only capital investment and oversight of a number of interdependent activities involving both manufacture and marketing, but also the existence of more competitive economic conditions and opportunities that made both efforts and results more varied and dynamic.

DESIGN IN AN EXPANDING MARKET

We may begin with the career of London cabinet-maker Thomas Chippendale (1718–1779). Chippendale published the illustrated furniture catalogue known as *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* in 1754, whose designs demonstrate an awareness of an expanding audience for luxury furnishings to decorate apartments and houses. Unlike earlier pattern or model books intended for workshop use (although it was certainly used as such by other cabinet-makers), Chippendale's *Director* targeted prospective *customers*; its publication was timed to coincide with the opening of parliament after a general election, when new members would be relocating to London and looking to furnish their apartments or town houses. Although

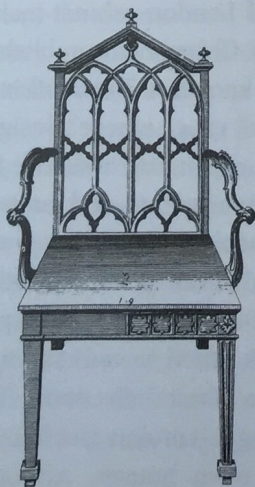
Chippendale trained as a cabinet-maker, his London shop provided complete services for custom interior design including upholstery and wall-coverings, and he was the overseer of a large workshop employing more than 150 craftsmen. The publication of the illustrated *Director*, the scale of operations, and the range of services all indicate Chippendale's attention to design and a growing interest in the decorative arts as an accompaniment to refined living and a mark of social distinction. The anonymous portrait dating to 1770 and reproduced in figure 2.1 represents the shop of an unidentified cabinet-maker who is preparing a drawing of a cabinet and bookcase to show to a prospective client. The younger man to the right has been identified as an employee, possibly the owner's bookkeeper. It is instructive to note that the cabinet-maker is not depicted as a craftsman in working attire but rather as a gentleman wearing breeches, a wig, and stockings – it is the retail end of the trade that is depicted, emphasizing the higher social standing connected with the roles of designer/merchant–manufacturer in fulfilling the aspirations of a client, and illustrating as well the distinctions and relationships among designing, making, and selling.

Chippendale's designs show a preference for contemporary French taste in the style of Louis XV, but the illustrated plates in the *Director* also include variations of this style such as Chinese motifs (chinoiserie) as well as furniture with decorative features based upon the Gothic style in architecture (figs. 2.2 and 2.3), which appealed to English taste at the time. Indeed, this heterogeneity and consciousness of style was characteristic of later eighteenth-century dress and other applied arts.

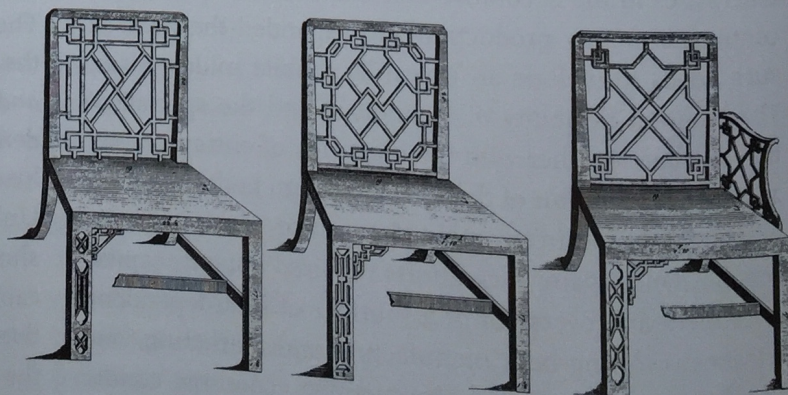
To what factors are we to attribute the eclecticism that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century in Britain? After all, the very coexistence of different styles in art challenges the general view of a successive and linear view of artistic change – the phenomenon of different tastes or styles

existing at the same time suggests that ideals of beauty were contested among different individuals and groups rather than reflecting the shared outlook of a single, hegemonic taste. Indeed, we might suggest two explanations, the first acknowledging a broader and more heterogeneous market that reveals diverse rather than the shared or uniform tastes of a narrow elite; and the second recognizing that the acquisition of commodities is a powerful and self-conscious expression of personal and social identity. Styles drew from history (more properly historicism, the tendency to attribute values and attitudes to the past) and travel, and acknowledged an emerging sense of individualism, far less monolithic and authoritarian than under centralized monarchical control. There was an accompanying tendency toward competition and change that increased more rapidly after political revolutions in the United States (1775) and France (1789), and the Peace of Vienna in 1815 following the defeat of Napoleon (see page 43). Some styles adopted the curved surfaces and delicate carving associated with French luxury furniture, while others indulged a penchant for heightened emotionalism associated with nature, the Middle Ages, or exotic places in the Near and Far East.

In this new era, royalty were not the only authorities in the creation of ideal images for imitation. Questioning tradition was an expression of freedom and independence, parallel to the growing and prized emancipation of the artist that emerged with the Romantic movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (and that was later commercially exploited by manufacturers). An expanding, elastic market, by nature, reflected more diverse tastes than those of a homogeneous, aristocratic patronage. Thus, in general terms, such variety was a result of an incipient democratization of culture based upon commerce and the enjoyment and consumption of commodities.



2.2 Thomas Chippendale, Gothic chair, detail of plate from *The Gentleman's and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, London, 17 3/4 x 12 1/4 in (45.1 x 31.1 cm), 1754.



2.3 Thomas Chippendale, Chinese chairs, detail of plate from *The Gentleman's and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, London, 17 3/4 x 12 1/4 in (45.1 x 31.1 cm), 1754.

2.4 Thomas Johnson, wall light, mahogany and painted pine, 43 1/2 x 30 x 16 1/2 in (110.5 x 76.2 x 41.9 cm), 1758. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



This phenomenon provided the political and social framework not only for the variety of styles in Chippendale's *Director* but also for even more curious invention and ingenuity. Thomas Johnson (1714–c. 1778) was a British designer and craftsman who specialized in the design of decorative frames and particularly of wall-mounted candelabra known as girandoles. Although the asymmetrical composition and spiral pendants seen in his published designs may have been inspired by the contemporary French taste for chinoiserie, many of Johnson's works demonstrate startling originality. A carved wooden wall light attributed to him (fig. 2.4) represents a rustic narrative scene complete with figures, architecture, and landscape. The freedom of invention is hardly conceivable without the existence of a public with disposable income eager for novelty, even fantasy. Thus we may conclude that the accelerated pace of change and variety in commodities, linked with the expression of Romantic ideals of individuality and a willingness to break with tradition, were potent social as well as economic catalysts to inventiveness in the decorative arts. Fashionable design and an eclectic range of products satisfied both the psychological and social aspirations of consumers and stimulated the entrepreneurial efforts of merchants, manufacturers, and artists.

Johnson's girandoles, like the clocks of Charles Cressent in France (see fig. 1.12), demonstrate that the desire for luxury living stimulated a healthy dialogue between fine and applied arts, by which the latter could rise above the merely mechanical or useful, acquiring both beauty, intellectual value, and conferring distinction upon their owners.

WEDGWOOD AND ANTIQUITY

Younger than Chippendale, another ingenious entrepreneur of this period in England was Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795), who came from a family of potters in Staffordshire, an area known throughout Britain at the time for the production of earthenware. As a trained craftsman, Wedgwood's early contribution was primarily technical. He successfully developed a process for making a cream-colored glazed earthenware (called creamware) that was considerably more refined than other local products, and that adopted the then-current preference in the luxury market for simple, regular shapes and a restrained approach to painted decoration. A friendship (and eventual partnership) with Thomas Bentley of Liverpool that began in 1762 was instrumental in connecting Wedgwood with the market for luxury ceramics, for Bentley traveled frequently to London and was aware of shoppers' preferences, information that contributed to the choice of pottery shapes and painted patterns for their embellishment. The decoration, eventually using stenciled transfer-printing rather than hand-painting, was supplied by a firm in the city of Liverpool, and may be seen in examples of creamware plates and serving dishes dating from 1790 (fig. 2.5). Wedgwood's experiments, both technical and in



2.5 Josiah Wedgwood, Queen's Ware with green *Water Leaf* pattern, earthenware, c. 1790. Wedgwood Museum, Stoke-on-Trent.

terms of design and marketing, resulted from a worldly outlook not uncommon among manufacturers and merchants of the time, and his creamware competed with more costly imported porcelain wares being produced in France and Germany for an exclusive market in the urban centers of Europe. With Bentley's privileged social connections, Wedgwood produced a large service of his creamware for Queen Charlotte of England (1744–1817), and this royal commission helped significantly to establish his firm's reputation for quality and fashion; indeed, after 1765 the design was known as Queen's Ware. Following this success he built a larger factory that he named Etruria in 1769. In the editions of his published catalogues, Wedgwood praised the influential patrons whose approval meant so much to the success of his wares:

The demand for this said Creamcolour, alias Queen's Ware, Alias Ivory, still increases. It is really amazing how rapidly the use of it has spread almost over the whole Globe, and how universally it is liked. How much of this general use, and estimation, is owing to the mode of its introduction – and how much to its real utility and beauty? are questions in which we may be a good deal interested for the government of our future Conduct ... For instance, if a Royal, or Noble introduction be as necessary to the sale of an Article of Luxury, as real Elegance and beauty, then the Manufacturer, if he consults his own interest will bestow as much pains, and expence too, if necessary, in gaining the former of these advantages, as he would in bestowing the latter.

Wedgwood capitalized on the enlarged Etruria facility to increase production. His efforts included the division of labor, the use of a small number of standardized shapes that were customized through being matched with a variety of decorative patterns, and the use of molds rather than potters' wheels. Sometimes referred to as "batch production," Wedgwood's initiatives and innovations saved time and ensured uniformity and high quality, maximizing consumer choice within a limited range of shapes and decorative patterns. Since sets of creamware and other Wedgwood products were selected either from catalogues or ordered in showrooms, it was essential to maintain consistency and quality, and in the course of his career Wedgwood developed thermometers to measure more accurately the temperature of his kilns. For this and other inventions he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (Britain's national academy of science) in 1783.

Wedgwood also was attuned to considerations of distribution and retailing: he helped to finance the construction of canals near the Etruria manufactory to control

transport, supply, and demand. He also sought to expand the market for his wares, for instance by opening a showroom in London and publishing an illustrated catalogue from which retail merchants could select and purchase samples. Wedgwood's career is a far cry from the image of the village craftsman. His skills and interest in quality may have initially been nourished in that milieu, but they matured and prospered amid increasingly entrepreneurial and competitive economic conditions, less strictly regulated than in France and directed toward an expanding market.

While the catalogues of Wedgwood ceramic wares display a variety of styles that catered to diverse tastes at mid-century, the patronage of wealthier clients and the appeal to their tastes was paramount to the company's success and reputation, as suggested by references in Wedgwood's correspondence (as noted above). Subsequent technical experiments by Wedgwood led to new stoneware products known as basalt and jasper wares, whose opaque surfaces in black and blue respectively were cast in molds with figural relief decoration in white, imitating friezelike compositions.

In recalling the stability and enduring humanistic values of the classical past, such stoneware catered to contemporary aristocratic taste for Greco-Roman antiquities, the rediscovery of the ancient Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the popularity of visiting these and other ancient sites on the Grand Tour (often in the company of knowledgeable guides). One of the most



2.6 Josiah Wedgwood, the Portland (Barberini) vase, black jasper ware, 10 x 7 1/4 in (25.4 x 18.7 cm), c. 1790. Wedgwood Museum, Stoke-on-Trent.

celebrated Roman objects of this period was the so-called Portland or Barberini vase, a cameo glass original of the first century BCE brought to Britain from Italy by an antiquities dealer and manufactured by Wedgwood in a series of stoneware copies beginning in 1790 (fig. 2.6). Wedgwood's stoneware designs such as the Barberini vase, or plaques with friezes, were based upon antique originals or upon models that Wedgwood commissioned from artists, including sculptor John Flaxman (1755–1826). These models (or designs) then become the basis for relief molds to create a variety of vases and plaques for firing and serial production.

Wedgwood marketed his classically inspired stoneware by successfully combining technical innovation and the most modern manufacturing methods with designs appealing to a sophisticated taste that recalled an idealized image of a past age. His success was also due in no small part to working closely with fine artists such as Flaxman, who championed the Neoclassical style and the enduring values it represented. In addition to his expertise as an innovative craftsman in the broadest sense of the word, Wedgwood's vision extended to design, marketing and merchandising, involving collaboration with artists.

Wedgwood's letters and project records provide a lively account of his business and the complex interrelationships among design, production, and marketing.

The emergence of the designer in craft production in Britain is also seen in the career of Robert Adam (1728–1792), an architect who supplied drawings of furniture and other interior furnishings to manufacturers (including Chippendale) for wealthy clients. Furniture designed by Adam incorporates elements of classically inspired architecture and decoration, often formal but enlivened by gilding and brightly colored silk fabrics or painted wall decorations. Kenwood, the estate of William Murray, the first Earl of Mansfield (1705–1793) in Hampstead Heath, London, was remodeled by Adam between 1764 and 1773, and its vaulted library was the public receiving room for the earl's guests (fig. 2.7). As an important judge serving under King George III, William Murray's library gives visual form to the education of its owner, with busts of Homer and Zeus located on either side of the earl's own painted portrait. Neoclassicism satisfied nostalgia for a golden age and gave reassurance of continuity with an imagined past. Classical motifs appear in the columns, garlands, and gilding that decorate the



2.7 Robert Adam, Library, Kenwood House, Hampstead, London, 1767–1769.

mirrors, which in turn reflect light throughout the interior from large windows across the room. Frescoes by the Italian painter Antonio Zucchi (1728–1795) depict allegories of the arts as related to learning and civilization. Here the theme alludes to humanity's use of nature for peaceful enjoyment of her bounty, which in turn is amplified by learning. The sensual themes are also interesting – a marriage and a Bacchanal (albeit in a relatively chaste version) are depicted among the benefits of nature's gifts.

The interiors of Kenwood reveal a learned and sophisticated taste distinct from the solid carved mahogany furniture and coarser fabrics of earlier Georgian interiors; they indicate as well a new appreciation for the decorative arts in communicating the enlightened attitudes and distinction of their owners. One wonders what motivated so many traditionally wealthy and more recently successful and powerful families to build or more often to remodel their estates in the later eighteenth century and hire Adam to give expression to their ideals and values. One might see the popularity of Adam's Neoclassical design as an assertion of cultivated taste and privilege in a period when official views were challenged by public opinion, when traditional class distinctions were undermined by a more socially mobile society, and when change and the threat it posed to the established order produced a longing for the stability of a golden age as a source not only of nostalgia for the past but of hope for the present and future. Murray himself was not born into great privilege or wealth. He rose to become a high court chief justice respected for fair but often liberal views, including his support for legislation to outlaw slavery in Great Britain.

COMMODITIES AND FASHION

In an age of material progress and commercial expansion, Chippendale and Wedgwood's success underscores the significant role commodities played in communicating social status and individual identity, particularly in an economic and political climate in which opportunities for upward social mobility existed. According to a number of historians, the market for commodities in England became "elastic" when traditional class distinctions were blurred by new wealth amassed through trade, industry, and manufacturing, by fewer restrictions on entrepreneurship, and by the mingling of social classes that constitutes an aspect of an emerging urban life. Within this context of social aspiration and ambiguity, the desire for manufactured products acquired new and complex levels of meaning.

New wealth held the promise of personal improvement and social acceptance; consumption was one of the visible signs of social status, through the emulation of

fashion in dress and the display of furnishings in the home. Fashions and manners might as easily reveal as provide the pretense of wealth, but it is the real prospect of social progress in Britain that provides the backdrop for the expanding market in the decorative arts and for experiments in design, production, and merchandising undertaken by Wedgwood and others.

Eighteenth-century attitudes toward the decorative arts appear in the novels of Jane Austen (1775–1817), for instance, in *Northanger Abbey* (begun 1798 but published posthumously) when the protagonist, Catherine Morland, comments favorably upon the elegance of her host's breakfast set. The host, General Tilney, responds that the English set compares favorably with continental porcelain production, but is already two years old; the sight of much improved specimens in town had almost tempted him to purchase an entirely new service. Such remarks reveal both a consciousness of design and the role played by novelty in home furnishings and suggest that designed goods are associated with improvement. Did the new tea set mentioned by the general pour more easily or preserve the flavor of the tea? It seems more likely that the new design possessed some perceived advantage that contributed to quality of life beyond its use value. It is the effort, or perhaps the game, of discerning wealth and position for the purposes of arranging marriages or favorable relationships, that lies at the heart of the novel and in which fashion, and manners, play a considerable part. In these circumstances, upwardly mobile middle-class buyers were beginning to experience and enjoy the comforts and convenience that commodities provided as well as the status they conferred, all formerly associated with a small and generally privileged landed aristocracy. Portraits from this period often register the pride and self-assurance of self-made individuals and their families through the possessions that surround them in their homes (including taking afternoon tea), the visible signs of self-improvement and upward social mobility.

However, even as the social motivations and pressures of modern fashion emerged in the eighteenth century, conflicting attitudes toward the phenomenon were also voiced. Novelty and change in design may indeed attest to democratization and signify a relaxation of social boundaries and opportunities for social advancement. Yet at the same time fashion was also criticized for the emphasis it placed upon ostentation and its conformity to values rooted in materialism – increasingly fashion was blamed for a decline in traditional values and the emphasis it placed upon the opinions of others. In contrast to the neutral observation on consumer attitudes in *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen's later novel *Mansfield Park* (1814) treats fashion with decided disdain. Here the acquisition of

commodities alone never substitutes for the pleasures and sensibilities of the “good” life. For instance, Edmund, a cousin of the novel’s central character, Fanny Price, laments that his friend and romantic interest, Mary Crawford, has fallen victim to the lure of fashion and materialism: “It is the influence of the fashionable world altogether that I am jealous of. It is the habits of wealth that I fear.” Fashion allows people to pretend to be that which they are not, and attitudes of the period reveal an interesting mix of attraction as well as suspicion toward consumption that persists throughout the history of modern design.

Not surprisingly, the “habits of wealth” were often associated with dress. In the course of the early eighteenth century, fashionable clothing was made of silk fabric, and in England silk weaving was centered in the east end of London at Spitalfields. The English monarchy took an interest in promoting silk weaving domestically, attracting French weavers and guaranteeing their rights in the industry. Trading companies brought raw silk for production, and from the 1730s designers operated within the industry, creating and selling patterns based upon the adaptation of designs from Lyon (see page 21). One of the best-known English designers from the 1730s through the mid-1750s was Anna Marie Garthwaite (1690–1763), who worked as a freelance designer, selling patterns to a number of weavers, primarily for silk fabrics to be used for dresses. The pattern illustrated in figure 2.8 is an example of her work from the 1740s, a brocade woven with a rich palette of bright lavender, yellow, blue, and green against a pale pink ground and a loose pattern of flowers, leaves, and a curved, twisting stem. A guide to English industries published in 1751 noted that Garthwaite had introduced the principles of painting to the art of weaving. Spitalfields silk was a successful export product to the British colonies, including North America, where it can be seen in portraits from the later eighteenth century. While the dominant approach to dress in the later eighteenth century in England reflected the French courtly example, costume historians often note a greater informality in English dress that is parallel to the more democratic tendencies of the period. Rather than overtly expressing distinctions, some examples of English eighteenth-century dress are simple and “natural,” as if conveying a certain egalitarianism, a recognition that, beneath the clothes we wear to communicate difference and individual identity, we are all basically the same. Writing on the subject of fashion and clothing in the early nineteenth century, the Scottish-born writer Thomas Carlyle (see page 58) stated that “within the most starched cravat there passes a windpipe and wesand, and under the thickest embroidered waistcoat beat a heart.” This more natural attire is seen in Angelica Kauffmann’s (1741–1807) portrait of Lady Elizabeth Foster



2.8 Anna Marie Garthwaite, silk brocade, 45 1/8 x 23 1/2 in (115 x 59.8 cm), c. 1740–50. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



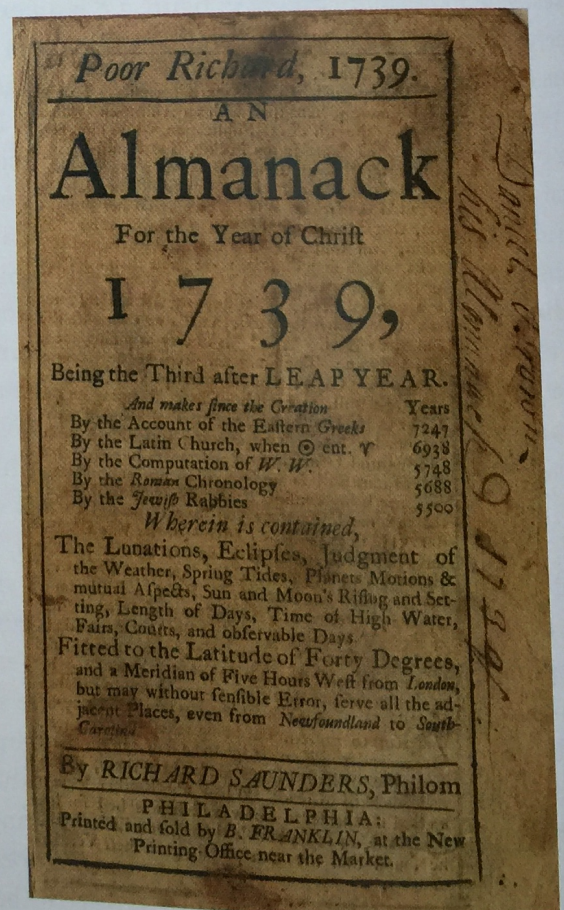
2.9 Angelica Kauffmann, *Portrait of Lady Elizabeth Foster*, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in (127 x 101.6 cm), 1784. Ickworth House, Suffolk.

dated 1784, featuring a straw bonnet and soft as well as plain muslin fabric (fig. 2.9).

To sum up, whether in the furniture business of Thomas Chippendale, the pottery business of Wedgwood and Bentley, or the silk industry in Spitalfields, design emerged in England as an integral component in expanding production of a variety of consumer products. Whether based upon adaptations from French luxury goods or a taste for classical antiquity beginning in the 1760s, design communicated a cultivated sensibility that added value to a variety of useful products. Increasingly separated from making and attuned to marketing, designers emerged from the manufacturing industry itself or worked as fine artists or architects publishing designs or consulting with manufacturers to produce their designs. The role of designer and merchant in England, like that of the *marchand mercier* in France, was to connect buyers with manufacturers. Primarily designs reflected aristocratic taste, but even that taste allowed for variety and a degree of democratization in a social and economic climate that offered opportunities for self-improvement, individual expression, and social advancement.

In the United States, the production and consumption of the decorative arts during the eighteenth century was much influenced by European trends and tastes. Spitalfields silks were imported to the colonies, and colonial craftsmen and workshops, inspired by the pages of Chippendale's *Director* and other contemporary model books, produced technically accomplished and distinctive carved furniture for well-to-do families in cities such as Boston and Philadelphia in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) purchased a creamware dinner service manufactured by Wedgwood for his estate at Monticello in Virginia, and in the dining room the fireplace is decorated with inset Wedgwood jasper-ware plaques (fig. 2.11). He also acquired a Sèvres dinner service following an extended visit to France from 1784 to 1789. In addition, Jefferson designed his own practical, often ingenious furniture, constructed by craftsmen on the premises of the estate. These were intended to increase his own productivity and efficiency, and included such items as a revolving bookstand and a table with a revolving top for his study.



2.10 Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, front cover, height 7 1/8 in (18.1 cm), 1739. Van Pelt-Dietrich Library, University of Pennsylvania.

POPULAR LITERATURE AND THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Readers familiar with the career of Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) are aware that this colonial founding father, inventor, and diplomat emerged from a craft background as printer and newspaper editor. Franklin was aware of continental developments in fine printing (see pages 28–30) and published some volumes of translations of classical literature in handsomely bound editions with spaciouly designed text pages. He also selected the fine types of English type founder William Caslon (1692–1766) for the printing of the *Declaration of Independence* in 1776. Yet Franklin is perhaps best known as the publisher of printed ephemera, most notably *Poor Richard's Almanack*, published annually between 1732 and

1757 (fig. 2.10). *Poor Richard's Almanack* contained varied commentaries and aphorisms as well as calendars and weather predictions, and were aimed at farmers and tradespeople of diverse backgrounds, providing a combination of practical information and wisdom, humor, and popular fiction in a serialized format. Distinguished neither by the excellence of their typography nor their single-column layout or crude illustrations and tables, the *Almanack* is significant in revealing Franklin's desire and ability to direct topical printed materials toward a broad and inclusive readership with common interests. The design of such printed material involved the use of inexpensive materials for paper and covers, maximizing space with narrow margins and reduced leading between lines of type, and title pages featuring large sizes of bold type and italic letters to attract attention.



2.11 Thomas Jefferson, dining room with fireplace and Wedgwood jasperware plaques, Monticello, Virginia, 1808–9.