the back of the Riesener Secrétaire à abattant (F300 in the Wallace). All pictures show how the different pieces were constructed. There are pictures from other pieces and exceptions are noted below the relevant picture.

There are a few noteworthy differences between Chippendale and Riesener as to how they approached the construction of the back and the internal constructions. The back of the Riesener secrétaire à abattant was a series of panels and dividers that slid up from the bottom to cover the internal construction. These panels and dividers were probably only screwed in or nailed in at the bottom (see Figure 5-74). Note that the grain of the four individual panels runs up and down, parallel to the sides of the secrétaire à abattant - as do the dividers which also run in that direction. However the grain of the dividers going perpendicular to the sides are also perpendicular to the sides. A note by P. Hughes, in The Wallace Collection Catalogue, states that:

“As on F300, the back of F302 slides downwards when two screws are removed from the bottom cross-brace; the interior fitment of the upper section can then be removed through the back of the secrète."²⁰⁸

Shown above are two pictures of two different Riesener secrétaire à abattant showing the back panels and how they are removed to allow access to the internal construction of each piece.²⁰⁹

The back of the Chippendale piece, on the other hand, was a single piece made up of different oak boards glued together (see Figure 5-75). In this case, there were no rails or separate panels, instead they were glued together side to side, similar to the way one would construct a table or cabinet top. It was impossible to see the actual joints between the

²⁰⁹ It was noted that this feature of the Riesener secrétaire à abattant probably saved many of them from destruction. Immediately after the revolution in France, participants were looking for evidence for use in trials and for money hidden inside. When they discovered that it was easy to turn these pieces on their face and to remove the backs. This allowed full access to the insides of these pieces of furniture, even to the hidden compartments. If this easy access was not available, it is very likely that they would have probably broken into their fronts and therefore probably destroying much of the artistry.
different boards - possibly they were simply glued together, or held using dowels or a variation of tongue and groove. This construction was then set in a rebate that ran around all four edges of the back with the boards screwed to the back. The face of this back panel was left unfinished, while the inside was covered with a clear coating of some kind to form an acceptable finish to the inside of the secrétaire (see Figure 5-75).

Looking at the internal structures of the secrétaire à abattants by Chippendale and Riesener, we can see how they differ. Starting from the top, the Chippendale piece has a decorative ‘crown’, while Riesener provided a marble surface upon which to display decorative items.

Figure 5-74: On the left is a picture of the back of The Waddesdon Manor secrétaire à abattant showing the rail-panel construction of the back. By studying the bottom of the picture carefully one can see the screws that are keeping the back from sliding down. The right hand side is a picture of a Wallace Collection secrétaire à abattant with the back partially slid down.
The approach of each maker to the top drawer is very similar; the top of the frame is the top

Oak backing board visible from the inside of the lower section of secrétaire.

Oak backing board as seen from the outside (back) of the secretary. Seen here are the sections for the crown and the top of the lower section.

Screw to hold lower section in rebate.

Figure 5-75: Above is the inside of the lower section of the Harewood secrétaire, showing the oak back, which was formed by the attachment of the boards to the back. The back view of the secrétaire is shown on the right. These two sections, on board for the crown and a series of boards, glued together for the lower sections, was inserted into a rebate, then attached with screws around the edge. Note the grain runs across the back.

Also note that there are no drawer guides in this particular instance, this is a different approach than that used by Riesener. As demonstrated earlier Riesener frequently used thick veneers of Rosewood in these situations.
of the drawer cavity and the top of the lower structural component provides the bottom. In both cases, a board is laid down, running from front to back, to guide the drawer’s movement between the side panels.

However there was a major difference between the two in their approach to the construction of the remaining interior. Chippendale viewed the main part of the internal construction as one continuous piece, which was then sub divided into sections. Riesener, on the other hand, appears to have conceived the *secrétai re á abattant* in two separate elements. Notice how on the Chippendale piece there is a continuous piece of wood that runs from top (below the drawer) to bottom (above the feet) spanning the entire central section. On the Riesener piece, however, the top section (which corresponds to the fall front) can be completely separated from the bottom half - see Figures 5-76 and 5-77.

In addition to these major structural differences, some minor differences also exist. For instance, to attach the sides of the internal components to the top, Chippendale used dovetails, whereas Riesener used a simple rebate. In other areas (for example to provide shelves for the drawers to slide on and to hold the dividers for the pigeon holes) both furniture makers used rebates. Riesener also used tenons across wall of the Fall Front (see Figure 5-77.

The Riesener *secrétai re* appears to have a wider space between the internal structure and the outer, decorative shell. This could be a function of two variables; the angle and depth of the chamfer (however both appear to be similar) or the thickness of the outer wall (the Chippendale piece has a much thicker wall since it is essentially two boards with the outer board being the Japanned panel). The middle of the internal frame is connected to the outer wall though a couple of wooden blocks in the Chippendale *secrétai re á abattant* but boards that run toward the centre are used in Riesener’s example.
Figure 5-76. To the right is the back of the Chippendale Secrétaire. (This picture was scanned from image in Harewood House files on veneered Secrétaire however this picture is of the Japanned Secrétaire that was made in the same manner as the veneered Secrétaire- it is assumed that since the size and shape of the two pieces are the same that the internal construction is the same.)

On both the Chippendale and the Riesener piece the grain in the side boards run from top to bottom, while the grain on the boards that run perpendicular to the sides are also perpendicular to the sides.

The pictures below and on the right and on the next page are the back of the Riesener Secrétaire are of the Secrétaire á abattant number F300 in The Wallace Collection.
Figure 5-77: Back of F300 with the back removed exposing key sections.
H. Exceptions

In this section, there were several pieces of furniture that did not fit the standard forms. There are a number of possibilities for the different approaches that were taken with these pieces, which will be discussed in greater detail throughout this section. The possible causes for these differences include a change in style for the cabinetmaker, the use of a subcontractor, or, at the other extreme it was made by someone trying to replicate the work style of either Chippendale or Riesener.

There was one piece among the Chippendale furniture and two among the Riesener selection that displayed unusual characteristics that set them apart from the others that were examined. 210

Obviously, the first question that this raises is whether these pieces were actually produced by the workshops that have been attributed? The answer must be a disappointing, “we do not know” but these exceptions do provide interesting comparisons. As discussed before, when we say that a piece of furniture was ‘made by’ a certain maker, what we really mean is that they were made by someone in their workshop - not by their own hand. It is safe to assume that there were certain standards and procedures that each workshop employed but we also know is that both Chippendale and Riesener had a number of employees reporting to them, each potentially different. We also know that at different times in their careers both Chippendale and Riesener were under a great deal of pressure to reduce prices and to produce furniture faster than they wanted. 211 Both were known to have subcontracted work out to other cabinetmakers to meet these problems, although another possibility is that these workshops occasionally tried new approaches to handle specific

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210 The two Chippendale pieces were not part of the group of Library Tables that were included in most of this thesis, but they were two dressing tables. While one of these was a dressing table that was very similar to many of the Chippendale designs for library tables the other was not similar at all. However, both provide some very good illustrations concerning how pieces that were made by Chippendale’s workshops can be identified.

211 For Chippendale this came in the form of clients arguing about the price or quality. This was, as discussed before, evident between Chippendale and the Harewood household, the Gerrick household and others. With Riesener, the differences were between Riesener and the Garde Mueble who entered the furniture into the inventory notes.
problems – resulting in deviation from the norm. If these exceptional pieces were made by someone who was either new to the workshop or disposed to doing things differently but were still employed by either Chippendale or Riesener, perhaps one would not expect to see quite so many differences as can be seen in these exceptional pieces. A new employee for example would probably have been carefully monitored throughout the making process – at least until the employee was familiar with the workshop standards. Other differences are inconsistent with the idea that the workshop was experimenting or simply trying to overcome some particular problem. So it is most likely that these pieces were either outsourced to other furniture makers or were made someone unrelated, although even in the case of a subcontracted piece, one would expect some greater consistency regarding quality and construction.

The Riesener example that has occasioned doubt in this author is the small *secrétaire à abattant* that is currently in the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris. It is generally of a good quality and reasonably consistent with Riesener’s style - see Figure 5-78 - but there are several reasons why this piece stands out:
The use of marquetry on the top-drawer frieze. In virtually all other secrétaires, Riesener used ormolu to decorate this section of the furniture. Furthermore, the way in which this marquetry piece is cut out differs from anything that was seen on other Riesener pieces – it was completely cut out of one piece of veneer.

Furthermore, this veneer was padouk, an unusual choice of timber for Riesener - see Figure 5-79. Not only has this author not seen an example of this type of marquetry on any other piece by Riesener, the style is one associated with the Hache family of furniture makers, operating during this time in the western part of France. 212 Although the mask featured in the design looks very similar to the mask

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212 Jean François Hache (1730-1796) was the fourth generation of cabinetmakers from Grenoble, France; the family business started with a Noël Hache (1630-1675), who set a workshop in Toulouse and handed the workshop to his son, Thomas Hache. He then moved the atelier to Grenoble. His son, Pierre, and his grandson, Jean-François, worked with him. In 1756, Jean François Hache went to Paris to study, where the Louis XV style and Oeben influenced him. He gradually took over the family workshop and around 1760 began to incorporate...
of Hercules that Riesener used on many of his pieces in ormolu, this version of the face has a type of vine growing out of the centre reminiscent of either a ‘green man’ or Bacchus. Either choice would be unusual For Riesener – though the latter would be consistent with the designs inspired by ancient mythologies (See Figure 5-79).

- The simplicity of the marquetry design on the top section on the abattant. While in theme this design is similar to other pieces, in its execution it is different. One would think that if one were executing a less expensive piece of furniture, it would be easier to take an old design and apply it to a new piece. However, it should be pointed out that the quality of the cutting on both this and the upper drawer section are of a very high quality, so for all its exceptional detail this piece is well executed.

- In general the ormolu appears to be simpler, less detailed and its execution is not of the standard found on other Riesener pieces. Though further research would be needed to verify it, the ormolu used on this piece may have been purchased off the peg and not custom made for this particular piece. As can be seen in this example, there are no highly polished highlights on this ormolu (Figure 5-80).
• The use of the levered doors on the bottom section of the secrétaire. This feature does not appear on any other secrétaire à abattants although it does appear on one of his commodes and on a smaller secrétaire.

• The overall size of this particular piece. This secrétaire is smaller than all other pieces that were included in this selection. Again, if one were to produce a less expensive piece, one would have thought that Riesener would have selected a design that he had used before. He had by this time produced a number of simple secrétaires for other patrons such as for the staff of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

• The length of the front dovetails on the drawers are longer than on other pieces.\(^\text{213}\) While the thickness of the front is similar to that of other Riesener secrétaire à abattants, this means that the quantity of wood in front of the dovetails is smaller - see Figure 5-81.

Despite these differences and perceived inconsistencies, the piece was well executed (very tight joints, smooth joins, good choice of timbers, etc.) The statistical qualities are generally similar to other Riesener pieces and the materials are of the quality associated with other Riesener pieces. While many of the design elements are unusual for Riesener, most can be seen in other pieces (the tambour doors, the trapezoidal panel, the poorer quality ormolu, etc.) and the stamp of Riesener is (reportedly) to be found on the frame.

While this Paris piece was different in some aspects, there is one other piece presently located at Versailles that is believed to have been commissioned by the royal family which also had some quality issues that also raised questions of attribution in this author. Once again this could have been a piece designed for a particular situation that

\(^{213}\) The front dovetails on the small drawer are approximately 15 mm whereas on other pieces the length is less than 10 mm.
required a particular look and size’, or a subcontracted piece, or perhaps an example of Riesener experimenting with a new style. Setting these explanations aside, the inconsistencies that raised question in this author are as follows:

• The ormolu, like that of the piece at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, is less refined than most other Riesener associated pieces. While the decorative motifs have been seen on other Riesener pieces, they are not common (see Figure 5-82 and also Appendix C: Maelrondt and the Frick Collection Secrétaire à Abattant).

• The back has a smooth surface made up of two panels held by one cross beam, fixed with screws. It does not slide out of the bottom like other Riesener pieces.

• There are locks on each of the individual small drawers behind the fall front which is unusual. The lock on the two lower drawers also locks both the lower and the higher drawer. Now while there are a number of cases where Riesen uses the fall front lock to lock a lower drawer, there is no example (to the best of this author’s

Figure 5-83: Lower Storage doors with rebated edges - not the typical tongue and groove usually used. Note lines reinforce shape of door edge.
knowledge) where a lower drawer locks the upper drawer.

• The metals used differ from those that Riesener used on other pieces. The lower doorplate, and the lock for the safe both appear to be made of steel, not brass or bronze – further testing would verify the type of metal.

• The doors on the lower drawer section do not use the tongue and groove device to hold them together when closed but make use of a double rebate as can be seen in Figure 5-83 – most unusual.

• The drawer construction also differs. First of all their front dovetails are much wider than others associated with Riesener. Secondly, the
bottom piece of timber does not have a rebate cut into its edge (See Figure 5-84). And finally the wood forming the sides and the bottom are thinner in cross section than those generally observed on other Riesener secrétaire à abattant.

- The frame at the top of this secrétaire à abattant (underneath the marble) is also different from that seen in all other pieces this author has documented. Instead of making use of two mitred pieces, there is a third piece that joins the two sides (see Figure 5-85) – much like the detail illustrated in Roubo. 214

The history of this piece supports the idea that it may have been produced in another workshop, perhaps under Riesener’s supervision. This piece was produced two months after the order for it had been placed, which represents an exceptionally fast turnaround for Riesener.

There is another piece that has just recently come to the attention of this author which also has some differences in its construction and that of the ‘standard’ approach used by Riesener. This piece is currently privately owned and is in Berlin. The only portion of its history that is known is that it was most recently purchased in Iran (soon after the fall of the Shah of Iran) and moved to its current location. While there is a stamp for Riesener, it is not a very clear stamp and there are no markings on the back supporting its entry into one of the Royal households (no inventory marks). The differences between this new piece and Riesener’s usual approach are listed below:

- The ormolu on the top has a guilloche pattern like many of Riesener’s other pieces but in this case instead of oval shapes, perfectly round circles form the pattern.
- The top section (under the marble top) uses a different kind of joint from either the one proposed by A. Roubo (discussed on p. 266) or the mitered joint usually used by Riesener (See p. 255)

- The overall size of the piece appears much narrower than any of the other pieces (the width has not been measured at this time).
- The configuration of the drawers in the top section is much different from the other sekretaia á abattant in that it includes two drawers that stretch across the entire sekretaia á abattant followed by two sets of small drawers (two on each side.)
- In the lower section there is no safe and there are adjustable shelves, which have not been used on any other Riesener piece known at this time.
- The dovetails on the drawers are longer and more narrow than those used on other pieces.

The owner believes that after Riesener was excluded from work for Marie Antoinette (1784) in an official capacity (as the Ébéniste du Roi) he changed his standard approach. He has actually asked that research to confirm or to disprove this theory be conducted (a proposal will be submitted to conduct this research.) A few overall pictures of this piece are included in Appendix C (page 467).

The Chippendale piece that has provoked some questions by this author regarding its

Figure 5-86: The Harewood Library Table (left) and the Harewood Dressing Table (right); both have extensive marquetry, with similar woods and similar Neo-Classical design elements.
attributed is a dressing table currently housed in the V & A which like the Harewood table was originally thought to have come from Harewood House.

As shown in Figure 5-86, these two pieces appear very similar in their overall approach to their design. Both are made of similar materials (oak, pine and mahogany structural elements, and satinwood, holly, and rosewood veneers, steel and brass locks, steel screws, etc.), and both make use of similar Neo-Classical motifs (e.g. swags, circular fan shaped patterns, vases).

While there is no bill for a veneered, marquetry dressing table to tie this piece to Harewood, there is a letter written by Lord Lascelles in which he refers to a marquetry dressing table by Chippendale. However (this author believes) there are substantial differences that need to be considered.

- The quality of the wood selected for the Harewood Dressing Table is incompatible with other Chippendale pieces. The quality of both the oak and the pine are inferior, with more knots than is usual - something first noted by the V & A, during a

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215 This was referenced and discussed in file notes for this piece of furniture, located in the V & A, See: Notes on file at V & A Museum for Register No W 55-1928 accessed 15-July-2009.
conservation exercise that took place in the late 1970’s\textsuperscript{216}. This dressing table now exhibits substantial amount of structural warping, especially in the drawer bottoms which are thinner than usual, as well of wide grain.

- There are several examples of marquetry which are similar between the Harewood table and the V&A dressing table; similar but not identical which would be more logical.\textsuperscript{217}

\textsuperscript{216} This was also referenced and discussed in file notes for this piece of furniture located in the V & A, See: Notes on file at V & A Museum for Register No W 55-1928 accessed 15-July-2009.
examples are to be found in the vase that is located on the door front and the small-enclosed petal designs that decorate the top border (see Figure 5-88).

- The quality of the cuts in the marquetry were also found to be inconsistent with the quality of cutting in the Harewood Library Table. There were larger gaps between the background and foreground veneers as well as marked differences in elements that should have looked the same (see Figure 5-89).

- The locks on the door were different from those used on every other piece of Chippendale furniture. On this dressing table, the latch is visible to the outside whereas on all other pieces, the latch is invisible – see Figure 5-90.

- The drawers that were behind the cabinet doors have cockbeading - again very unusual for Chippendale.

- The feet are very unusual for Chippendale.

- The dressing table lacks ormolu – not unusual in itself but unusual in terms of its (seeming) relation to the Harewood Library Table.

There is evidence to suggest that Lascelles did commission cabinetmakers other than Chippendale, for example the commode by Renishaw (as per C. Gilbert\textsuperscript{218}). Furthermore the Lascelles reference to his dressing table is vague and possibly could have indicated a piece made for Lascelles by local furniture makers in imitation of the Harewood Library Table.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{217} From an aesthetic point of view, making the elements of the two pieces match exactly would better connect the two pieces together (why else would one have two pieces of furniture made by the same person, in the same general style?) From a practical point of view, once a design element has been drawn out and the template made, it is easier to copy the design exactly and not create an entirely new design.


C. Gilbert, \textit{The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale}. 
Prices Paid For these Pieces: A discussion of the prices paid for the two pieces which stand at the heart of this case study may add to our understanding of these two pieces by providing us with some idea as to the value that the culture of the time placed on these two pieces of furniture and some insight into the lives of those who purchased them.

No record of the actual price paid for Chippendale Library Table has ever been found, either in Harewood House or Chippendale’s records. However there are two things that we do know. First of all we know the price paid for similar tables by Chippendale and secondly, we know that the Harewood table was the most elaborate library table he ever produced. It had very elaborate marquetry which none of the other library tables had; it was also decorated with high quality ormolu of a kind not found on any other library table and so we can safely assume that the Harewood Library Table was more expensive than any of the other library tables made by Chippendale. Of the library tables that Chippendale made, the prices of four library tables are known. These are shown in the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Table</th>
<th>Brief Description (When Made)</th>
<th>Price Paid (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dumfries Library Table</td>
<td>Basic design with fold out drawing/reading platform and large drawing drawer (between 1759 and 1766).</td>
<td>£22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostell Priory Library Table</td>
<td>Heavily carved table with foldout drawing/reading platform and large drawing drawer (Made between 1766 and 1785).</td>
<td>£72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harewood House secrétaire</td>
<td>This drop front secrétaire is modelled after the French design. It is covered with marquetry, but has no ormolu (Made in 1772).</td>
<td>£26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mersham Le Hatch Library Table</td>
<td>(No picture or description is available for this piece of furniture) (Made in 1767).</td>
<td>£12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corsham Court Library Table</td>
<td>Gothic style table with brass rim around the top, basic features except that it has more drawers than usual (Made in 1779).</td>
<td>£18.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that in the correspondence between Chippendale and the house, this price was for a japanned secrétaire with the japanned panels being supplied by the client. While it is clear that a secrétaire was delivered to Harewood House, it is not clear if it was the Japanned model as the model that is currently at Harewood House is a marquetry version which is probably slightly more expensive than the japanned version.
Using the exchange rates discussed in Appendix B (section 2) there was 24 French livre to 1-pound sterling in the C18th. So in C18th livre, the cost of these pieces of furniture was as follows: Dumfries – 528 livre, Nostell Priory – 1,728 livre, Harewood House Secretary – 624 livre, Mersham Le Hatch – 288 livre, Corsham Court – 466 livre. Since the Harewood Library table was much more elaborate than any other of Chippendales other tables, it is safe to assume that its cost was higher than that of any of these other pieces.

We do have prices for a number of Riesener *secrétaire à abattants* and other authors have been able to locate prices of some of the least expensive models of Riesener’s *secrétaire à abattant*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Secrétaire à Abattant</th>
<th>Brief Description (When Made)</th>
<th>Price (Livre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waddesdon Manor Secrétaire à abattant</td>
<td>Large Secrétaire à abattant with elaborate marquetry and ormolu on front and sides. Made in 1777.</td>
<td>8120²²¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY Met Secrétaire à abattant</td>
<td>A black lacquered panelled secrétaire à abattant with detailed floral ormolu. Made in 1783 or 1784</td>
<td>6000²²²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountanieu Secrétaire à abattant</td>
<td>Large Secrétaire à abattant with elaborate marquetry and ormolu on front and sides – made in 1771.</td>
<td>7000²²³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering that a simpler version of Riesener’s *secrétaire* was invoiced at about 300 to 400 livre, it seems that the cost for similarly featured pieces were actually about the same in England as in France.²²⁴ However, on balance, it would seem that the French pieces (arguably) provided better value for money - they were decorated with highly detailed


marquetry, a better quality of ormolu, they were larger and contained more features in the way of elaborate locks, secret compartments, etc.

I. Concluding Remarks

It is interesting to note that there is a myth perpetrated among restorers about the lower quality of structural elements of French furniture, compared to English furniture. Essentially the myth is that French furniture from this period looks ‘better’ than English furniture but that English furniture has higher quality construction. This proved not to be the case, both of these cabinetmakers produced very high quality furniture. From the detailed study of these pieces it was obvious that both workshops were very concerned with producing the best quality of furniture available at that time. One could speculate that they were both developing and setting the standards for making good quality furniture by establishing excellent working standards. From the selection of the wood, to the cutting of the dovetails to the selection of the veneers, both makers however were different in their approaches (e.g., Chippendale used long slender front dove tails, he used pine, spruce, fir or other similar wood, while Riesener used shorter less angular dovetails on the drawer fronts and only oak in his construction (both furniture makers sometimes used mahogany for the drawer fronts.).

Listed within this chapter, are all of the details about the approaches that Chippendale and Riesener used to construct these pieces as well as many other similar pieces of furniture. Included is a comparison of the ways in which the drawers were constructed, the materials used, the way the marquetry was executed, the ormolu and the designs of these two pieces. As they are presented in detail in this chapter and they are summarized in the next, concluding, chapter (Starting on p. 332.), they will not be listed here.

From a cultural viewpoint, both pieces represented different variations of the Neo-Classical pieces of furniture. While the Harewood Library Table displayed many of the classical motifs in the marquetry patterns and in its ormolu, the Riesener secrétaire à abattant seemed to be embracing more the classical form with very straight and simplified lines, displaying a
few classical symbols in its ormolu. From the study of the features offered on these pieces, English aristocrats were probably more interested in architecture and the arts. The library tables represented a much stronger, more imposing presence (one could argue a more masculine presence) in part due to its size and in part due to its location in the centre of the room. The *secrétaire à abattant*, on the other hand, indicates a greater need for secrecy both in its function with the three locks, and the complicated locking systems and its location and presence in a room (it was always located against a wall and when closed it offered a very non-intrusive profile.) Thus, the *secrétaire à abattant* was designed not to have a strong presence, but instead it was designed to blend into the walls. This too suggests the stronger need for secrecy. The fact that the *secrétaire à abattant* could close up hiding all work surfaces, again suggests a strong desire for privacy.