In 1974, New York-based furniture designer Dakota Jackson was commissioned by a client to design a desk as a birthday present for the woman's ex-lover. The desk, intended by the client to be a "mystical object," was to contain multiple hidden compartments. One of these compartments involved a Chinese puzzle component, requiring the recipient to engage in a sort of game, rearranging the pieces in a specific formation in order to access a hidden drawer. About 40 years later, when the woman brought the desk back to Jackson for restoration, she revealed that she had placed a photograph of herself in one of the compartments, so that her ex-lover, who was living with someone else at the time, could keep a piece of their relationship, hidden away.

"In a way, it was a sort of love charm, a way of saying never forget me," Jackson told me recently over the phone. The love charm worked — the woman was Yoko Ono and her ex-lover, John Lennon.

From Michaelangelo's secret hiding room beneath the Medici Chapel to the various false-bottom contraptions that riddled teen sleuth Nancy Drew's investigations, hidden compartments have long been featured in literature and historical half-truths as a way of revealing what people least want the outside world to see. "It's interesting, people have different things they want to hide," said Jackson. "If you can keep a secret, let's say, and nobody was to know that whatever the object you possess has additional elements to it like hidden compartments, then it's really personal. It brings you into a closer connection... It holds a sense of wonder in that...whatever you put in this object is for safekeeping."

The Desk has been on display at both SCAD and The Jewish Museum, New York.

