

# White House, Washington



The official home for the U.S. president was designed by Irish-born architect James Hoban in the 1790s. Rebuilt after a British attack in 1814, the “President’s House” evolved with the personal touches of its residents, and accommodated such technological changes as the installation of electricity. The building underwent major structural changes in the early 1900s under Teddy Roosevelt, who also officially established the “White House” moniker, and again under Harry Truman after WWII. Counting the Oval Office and the Rose Garden among its famous features, it remains the only private residence of a head of state open free of charge to the public.

Not long after the inauguration of President George Washington in 1789, plans to build an official President’s House in a federal district along the Potomac River took shape. A contest to find a builder produced a winning design from Irish-born architect James Hoban, who modeled his building after an Anglo-Irish villa in Dublin called the Leinster House.

The cornerstone was laid on October 13, 1792, and over the next eight years a construction team comprised of both enslaved and freed African Americans and European immigrants built the Aquia Creek sandstone structure. It was coated with lime-based whitewash in 1798, producing a color that gave rise to its famous nickname. Built at a cost of \$232,372, the two-story house was not quite completed when John Adams and Abigail Adams became the first residents on November 1, 1800.

Thomas Jefferson added his own personal touches upon moving in a few months later, installing two water closets and working with architect Benjamin Latrobe to add bookending terrace-pavilions. Having transformed the building into a more suitable representation of a

leader's home, Jefferson held the first inaugural open house in 1805, and also opened its doors for public tours and receptions on New Year's Day and the Fourth of July.

Burned to the ground by the British in August 1814, the President's House was nearly left in its smoldering remains as lawmakers contemplated moving the capital to another city. Instead, Hoban was brought back to rebuild it nearly from scratch, in some areas incorporating the original, charred walls. Upon reassuming residency in 1817, James Madison and his wife Dolley gave the home a more regal touch by decorating with extravagant French furniture.

The building's South and North Porticoes were added in 1824 and 1829, respectively, while John Quincy Adams established the residence's first flower garden. Subsequent administrations continued to overhaul and bolster the interior through Congressional appropriations; the Fillmores added a library in the second-floor oval room, while the Arthurs hired famed decorator Louis Tiffany to redecorate the east, blue, red and state dining rooms. William Taft hired architect Nathan Wyeth to expand the executive wing in 1909, resulting in the formation of the Oval Office as the president's work space. In 1913, the White House added another enduring feature with Ellen Wilson's Rose Garden. A fire during the Hoover administration in 1929 destroyed the executive wing and led to more renovations, which continued after Franklin Roosevelt entered office. Architect Eric Gugler more than doubled the space of what was becoming known as the "West Wing," added a swimming pool in the west terrace for the polio-stricken president, and moved the Oval Office to the southeast corner. A new east wing was constructed in 1942, its cloakroom transformed into a movie theater.

A final major overhaul took place after Harry Truman entered office in 1945. With structural problems mounting from the 1902 installation of floor-bearing steel beams, most of the building's interior was stripped bare as a new concrete foundation went in place. The Trumans helped redesign most of the state rooms and decorate the second and third floors, and the president proudly displayed the results during a televised tour of the completed house in 1952.

Over the course of 1969-70, a porte-cochere and circular drive were added to the exterior of the West Wing, with a new press briefing room installed inside. Following a 1978 study to assess the exterior paint, up to 40 layers were removed in some areas, allowing for repairs of deteriorated stone. Meanwhile, the Carter administration set about adjusting to a new information age by installing the White House's first computer and laser printer. The internet made its debut in the mansion under the watch of George H.W. Bush in 1992.

The White House today holds 142 rooms on six floors, the floor space totaling approximately 55,000 square feet. It has hosted longstanding traditions such as the annual Easter Egg Roll, as well as historic events like the 1987 nuclear arms treaty with Russia. The only private residence of a head of state open free of charge to the public, the White House reflects a nation's history through the accumulated collections of its residing presidents, and serves as a worldwide symbol of the American republic.