

# White House

The **White House** is the official residence and workplace of the president of the United States. It is located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW in Washington, D.C., and has been the residence of every U.S. president since John Adams in 1800. The term "White House" is often used as a metonym for the president and their advisers.

The residence was designed by Irish-born architect James Hoban<sup>[3]</sup> in the neoclassical style. Hoban modelled the building on Leinster House in Dublin, a building which today houses the Oireachtas, the Irish legislature. Construction took place between 1792 and 1800 using Aquia Creek sandstone painted white. When Thomas Jefferson moved into the house in 1801, he (with architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe) added low colonnades on each wing that concealed stables and storage.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1814, during the War of 1812, the mansion was set ablaze by the British Army in the Burning of Washington, destroying the interior and charring much of the exterior. Reconstruction began almost immediately, and President James Monroe moved into the partially reconstructed Executive Residence in October 1817. Exterior construction continued with the addition of the semi-circular South portico in 1824 and the North portico in 1829.

Because of crowding within the executive mansion itself, President Theodore Roosevelt had all work offices relocated to the newly constructed West Wing in 1901. Eight years later in 1909, President William Howard Taft expanded the West Wing and created the first Oval Office, which was eventually moved as the section was expanded. In the main mansion, the third-floor attic was converted to living quarters in 1927 by augmenting the existing hip roof with long shed dormers. A newly constructed East Wing was used as a reception area for social events; Jefferson's colonnades connected the new wings. East Wing alterations were completed in 1946, creating additional office space. By 1948, the residence's load-bearing exterior walls and internal wood beams were found to be close to failure. Under Harry S. Truman, the interior rooms were completely dismantled and a new internal load-bearing steel frame constructed inside the walls. On the exterior, the Truman Balcony was added. Once the structural work was completed, the interior rooms were rebuilt.

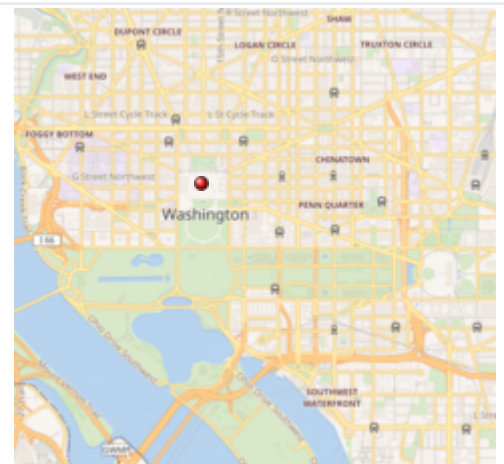
The modern-day White House complex includes the Executive Residence, West Wing, East Wing, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (the former State Department, which now houses offices for the president's staff and the vice president) and Blair House, a guest residence. The Executive Residence is made up of

## White House



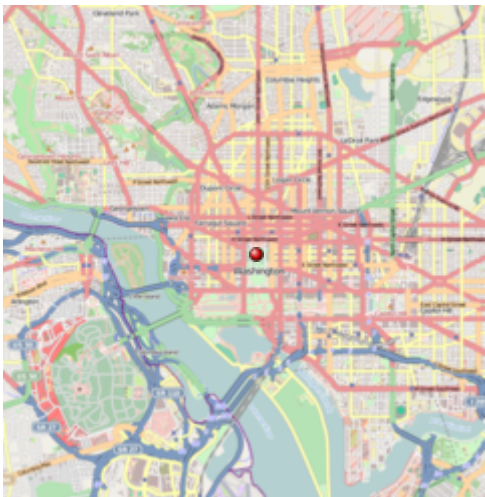
Top: the northern facade with a columned portico facing Lafayette Square

Bottom: the southern facade with a semi-circular portico facing the South Lawn and The Ellipse



Location in Central Washington, D.C.

six stories: the Ground Floor, State Floor, Second Floor, and Third Floor, as well as a two-story basement. The property is a National Heritage Site owned by the National Park Service and is part of the President's Park. In 2007, it was ranked second<sup>[5]</sup> on the American Institute of Architects list of "America's Favorite Architecture".



Location in Washington, D.C.



Location in United States

| General information     |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Architectural style     | <u>Neoclassical</u> ,<br><u>Palladian</u>   |
| Address                 | 1600<br><u>Pennsylvania</u><br><u>Avenue NW</u><br><u>Washington</u> ,<br><u>D.C.</u> 20500<br>U.S. |
| Coordinates             | <u>38°53′52″N</u><br><u>77°02′11″W</u>  |
| Current tenants         | <u>Joe Biden</u> ,<br>President of the<br>United States<br>and the <u>First</u><br><u>Family</u>    |
| Construction started    | October 13,<br>1792   |
| Completed               | November 1,<br>1800 <sup>[1]</sup>  |
| Technical details       |   |
| Floor area              | 55,000 sq ft<br>(5,100 m²)  |
| Design and construction |   |

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# Early history

## 1789–1800

Following his April 1789 inauguration, President George Washington occupied two private houses in New York City as the executive mansion. He lived at the first, known as the Franklin House and owned by Treasury Commissioner Samuel Osgood, at 3 Cherry Street through late February 1790.<sup>[6][7]</sup> The executive mansion moved to the larger quarters of the Alexander Macomb House at 39–41 Broadway<sup>[7]</sup> where he stayed, with his wife and a small staff until August 1790. In May 1790, New York began construction of a "proper" house for the presidential mansion, Government House.<sup>[8]</sup> Washington never used the mansion because it was not completed until after the national capital was moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in December 1790.<sup>[8]</sup>

The July 1790 Residence Act designated the capital be permanently located in the new Federal District, and temporarily in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for ten years while the permanent capital was built.<sup>[9]</sup> Philadelphia rented the mansion of the wealthy merchant Robert Morris at 190 High Street (now 524–30 Market Street) as the President's House, which Washington occupied from November 1790 to March 1797.<sup>[10]</sup> Since the house was too small to accommodate the thirty people who made up the presidential family, staff, and servants, Washington had it enlarged.<sup>[10]</sup>

President John Adams also occupied the High Street mansion from March 1797 to May 1800. On Saturday, November 1, 1800, he became the first president to occupy the White House.<sup>[11]</sup>

The President's House in Philadelphia was converted into the Union Hotel, and later used for stores, before being demolished in 1832.<sup>[10]</sup>

Philadelphia began construction of a much grander presidential mansion several blocks away in 1792. It was nearly completed by the time of Adam's 1797 inauguration. However, Adams declined to occupy it saying he did not have Congressional authorization to lease the building. It remained vacant until it was sold to the University of Pennsylvania in 1800.<sup>[12]</sup>

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Architect</b>                                 | <u>James Hoban</u>  |
| <b>Website</b>                                   | <a href="https://whitehouse.gov">whitehouse.gov</a> ( <a href="https://whitehouse.gov/">https://whitehouse.gov/</a> )                           |
| <b>U.S. National Register of Historic Places</b> |   |
| <b>U.S. National Historic Landmark</b>           |   |
| <b>NRHP reference No.</b>                        | 19600001 ( <a href="https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/1960001">https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/1960001</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup> |
| <b>Designated NHL</b>                            | December 19, 1960   |



Aerial view of the White House complex, from north. In the foreground is Pennsylvania Avenue, closed to traffic. Center: Executive Residence (1792–1800) with North Portico (1829) facing; left: East Wing (1942); right: West Wing (1901), with the Oval Office (1934) at its southeast corner.



First Presidential Mansion: Samuel Osgood House, Manhattan, New York. Occupied by Washington: April 1789 – February 1790.



Second Presidential Mansion: Alexander Macomb House, Manhattan, New York. Occupied by Washington: February–August 1790.



Third Presidential Mansion: President's House, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Occupied by Washington: November 1790 – March 1797. Occupied by Adams: March 1797 – May 1800.



Government House, Manhattan, New York (1790–1791). Built to be the permanent presidential mansion, Congress moved the national capital to Philadelphia before its completion.



House intended for the President, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1790s). Built to be the permanent presidential mansion, it was not used by any President.

## Architectural competition

The President's House was a major feature of Pierre (Peter) Charles L'Enfant's<sup>[a]</sup> 1791 plan for the newly established federal city, Washington, D.C.<sup>[13]</sup> Washington and his Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, who both had personal interests in architecture, agreed that the design of the White House, and the Capital, would be chosen in a design competition.<sup>[14]</sup>



Although all proposals for the Capital were rejected, an acceptable drawing for the White House submitted by James Hoban was selected from several including one submitted anonymously by Jefferson himself.<sup>[15]</sup>

Hoban was born in Ireland and trained at the Dublin Society of Arts. He emigrated to the US after the revolution, first seeking work in Philadelphia and later finding success in South Carolina where he designed several buildings including the state capitol at Columbia. Hoban ultimately supervised the construction of both the US Capitol and the White House.<sup>[16]</sup>

President Washington visited Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1791 on his "Southern Tour", and saw the under-construction Charleston County Courthouse designed by Hoban. He is reputed to have met with Hoban then. The following year, he summoned the architect to Philadelphia and met with him in June 1792.<sup>[17]</sup>

On July 16, 1792, the president met with the commissioners of the federal city to make his judgment in the architectural competition. His review is recorded as being brief, and he quickly selected Hoban's submission.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Design influences

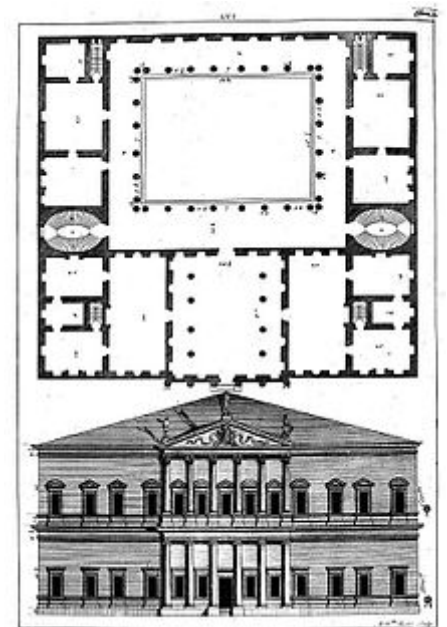
The building has classical inspiration sources, that can be found in the styles of the Roman architect Vitruvius and the Venetian architect Andrea Palladio; Palladio being an Italian architect of the Renaissance whose style evolved into Palladian architecture, which became popular in North America in the 18th century. Hoban's design is influenced by the upper floors of Leinster House, in Dublin, which later became the seat of the Oireachtas (the Irish parliament).<sup>[19]</sup> Several other Georgian-era Irish country houses have been suggested as sources of inspiration for the overall floor plan, details like the bow-fronted south front, and interior details like the former niches in the present Blue Room. These influences, though undocumented, are cited in the official White House guide, and in White House Historical Association publications. The first official White House guide, published in 1962, suggested a link between Hoban's design for the South Portico and Château de Rastignac, a neoclassical country house located in La Bachellerie in the Dordogne region of France and designed by Mathurin Salat. Construction on the French house was initially started before 1789, interrupted by the French Revolution for twenty years and then finally built 1812–1817 (based on Salat's pre-1789 design).<sup>[20]</sup> The theoretical link between the two houses has been criticized because Hoban did not visit France. Supporters of a connection posit that Thomas Jefferson, during his tour of Bordeaux in 1789, viewed Salat's architectural drawings (which were on-file at the college) at the École Spéciale d'Architecture (Bordeaux Architectural College).<sup>[21]</sup> On his return to the US he then shared the influence with Washington, Hoban, Monroe, and Benjamin Henry Latrobe.<sup>[20]</sup>



Hoban's Charleston County Courthouse, Charleston, South Carolina, 1790–92, was admired by Washington.



A 1793 elevation by James Hoban. His 3-story, 9-bay original submission was altered into this 2-story, 11-bay design.



Drawing of Andrea Palladio, *Project for Francesco et Lodovico de Trissini*, from the book *I quattro libri dell'architettura*, 1570

## Construction

Though there is no record of a formal ceremony,<sup>[b]</sup> construction of the White House began at noon on October 13, 1792, with the laying of the cornerstone.<sup>[23]</sup> The main residence, as well as foundations of the house, were built largely by enslaved and free African-American laborers, as well as employed Europeans.<sup>[24]</sup> Much of the other work on the house was performed by immigrants, many not yet with citizenship. The sandstone walls were erected by Scottish immigrants, employed by Hoban,<sup>[25]</sup> as were the high-relief rose and garland decorations above the north entrance and the "fish scale" pattern beneath the pediments of the window hoods. There are conflicting claims as to where the sandstone used in the construction of the White House originated. Some reports suggest sandstone from the Croatian island of Brač (specifically the Pučišća quarry whose stone was used to build the ancient Diocletian's Palace in Split) was used in the original construction of the building, contrarily researchers believe limestone from the island was used in the 1902 renovations and not the original construction. Others suggest the original sandstone simply came from Aquia Creek in Stafford County, Virginia, as importing the stone would be too costly.<sup>[26][27][28]</sup> The initial construction took place over a period of eight years, at a reported cost of \$232,371.83 (equivalent to \$3,543,000 in 2020). Although not yet completed, the White House was ready for occupancy circa November 1, 1800.<sup>[29]</sup>

Shortages of material and labor forced alterations to the earlier plan developed by French engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant for a "palace" that was five times larger than the house that was eventually built.<sup>[25]</sup> The finished structure contained only two main floors instead of the planned three, and a less costly brick served as a lining for the stone façades. When construction was finished, the porous sandstone walls were whitewashed with a mixture of lime, rice glue, casein, and lead, giving the house its familiar color and name.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Architectural description

The north front is the principal façade of the White House and consists of three floors and eleven bays. The ground floor is hidden by a raised carriage ramp and parapet, thus the façade appears to be of two floors. The central three bays are behind a prostyle portico (this was a later addition to the house, built circa 1830) serving, thanks to the carriage ramp, as a porte cochere. The windows of the four bays flanking the portico, at first-floor level, have alternating pointed and segmented pediments, while at second-floor level the pediments are flat. The principal entrance at the center of the portico is surmounted by a lunette fanlight. Above the entrance is a sculpted floral festoon. The roofline is hidden by a balustraded parapet.

The mansion's southern façade is a combination of the Palladian and neoclassical styles of architecture. It is of three floors, all visible. The ground floor is rusticated in the Palladian fashion. At the center of the façade is a neoclassical projecting bow of three bays. The bow is flanked by five bays, the windows of which, as on the north façade, have alternating segmented and pointed pediments at first-floor level. The bow has a ground



The North Portico of the White House compared to Leinster House



The Château de Rastignac compared to the South Portico of the White House, c. 1846

floor double staircase leading to an Ionic colonnaded loggia (with the Truman Balcony at second-floor level), known as the south portico. The more modern third floor is hidden by a balustraded parapet and plays no part in the composition of the façade.

## Naming conventions

The building was originally variously referred to as the "President's Palace", "Presidential Mansion", or "President's House".<sup>[30]</sup> The earliest evidence of the public calling it the "White House" was recorded in 1811.<sup>[31]</sup> A myth emerged that during the rebuilding of the structure after the Burning of Washington, white paint was applied to mask the burn damage it had suffered,<sup>[32]</sup> giving the building its namesake hue.<sup>[33]</sup> The name "Executive Mansion" was used in official contexts until President Theodore Roosevelt established the formal name by having "White House–Washington" engraved on the stationery in 1901.<sup>[34][35]</sup> The current letterhead wording and arrangement "The White House" with the word "Washington" centered beneath goes back to the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>[35]</sup>

Although the structure was not completed until some years after the presidency of George Washington, there is speculation that the name of the traditional residence of the president of the United States may have derived from Martha Washington's home, White House Plantation in Virginia, where the nation's first president had courted the first lady in the mid-18th century.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Evolution of the White House

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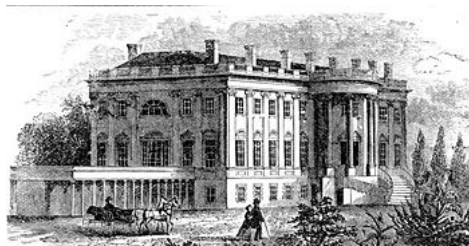
### Early use, the 1814 fire, and rebuilding

On Saturday, November 1, 1800, John Adams became the first president to take residence in the building.<sup>[25]</sup> The next day he wrote his wife Abigail: "I pray Heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this House, and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof."<sup>[37]</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt had Adams's blessing carved into the mantel in the State Dining Room.<sup>[37]</sup>

Adams lived in the house only briefly before Thomas Jefferson moved into the "pleasant country residence"<sup>[38]</sup> in 1801. Despite his complaints that the house was too big ("big enough for two emperors, one pope, and the grand lama in the bargain"),<sup>[39]</sup> Jefferson considered how the White House might be added to. With Benjamin Henry Latrobe, he helped lay out the design for the East and West Colonnades, small wings that help conceal the domestic operations of laundry, a stable and storage.<sup>[25]</sup> Today, Jefferson's colonnades link the residence with the East and West Wings.<sup>[25]</sup>

In 1814, during the War of 1812, the White House was set ablaze by British troops<sup>[40]</sup> during the Burning of Washington, in retaliation for attacking and burning Toronto (then called York),<sup>[41]</sup> Port Dover and other towns in Upper Canada; much of Washington was affected by these fires as well. Only the exterior walls remained, and they had to be torn down and mostly reconstructed because of weakening from the fire and subsequent exposure to the elements, except for portions of the south wall. Of the numerous objects taken from the White House when it was ransacked by British troops, only three have been recovered. Employees and slaves rescued a painting of George Washington,<sup>[40]</sup> in 1939, a Canadian man returned a jewelry box to President Franklin Roosevelt, claiming that his grandfather had taken it from Washington, and, also in 1939, a medicine chest that had belonged to President Madison was returned by the descendants of a British naval officer.<sup>[42][43]</sup> Some observers allege that most of these spoils were lost when a convoy of British ships led by HMS *Fantome* sank en route to Halifax off Prospect during a storm on the night of November 24, 1814,<sup>[44][45]</sup> even though *Fantome* had no involvement in that action.<sup>[46]</sup>

After the fire, President James Madison resided in the Octagon House from 1814 to 1815, and then the Seven Buildings from 1815 to the end of his term.<sup>[47]</sup> Meanwhile, both architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe and Hoban contributed to the design and oversight of the reconstruction, which lasted from 1815 until 1817. The south portico was constructed in 1824 during the James Monroe administration; the north portico was built six years later.<sup>[25]</sup> Though Latrobe proposed similar porticos before the fire in 1814, both porticos were built as designed by Hoban.<sup>[48]</sup> An elliptical portico at Château de Rastignac in La Bachellerie, France with nearly identical curved stairs is speculated as the source of inspiration due to its similarity with the South Portico,<sup>[49]</sup> although this matter is one of great debate.<sup>[50]</sup> Italian artisans, brought to Washington to help in constructing the U.S. Capitol, carved the decorative stonework on both porticos. Contrary to speculation, the North Portico was not modeled on a similar portico on another Dublin building, the Viceregal Lodge (now *Áras an Uachtaráin*, residence of the President of Ireland), for its portico postdates the White House porticos' design.<sup>[49]</sup> For the North Portico, a variation on the Ionic Order was devised incorporating a swag of roses between the volutes. This was done to link the new portico with the earlier carved roses above the entrance.



The White House as it looked following the fire of August 24, 1814

Jefferson and Latrobe's West Wing Colonnade, in this nineteenth-century engraved view, is now the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room.

Principal story plan for the White House by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1807



Earliest known photograph of the White House, taken c. 1846 by John Plumbe during the administration of James K. Polk

## Overcrowding and building the West Wing



By the time of the American Civil War, the White House had become overcrowded. The location of the White House was questioned, just north of a canal and swampy lands, which provided conditions ripe for malaria and other unhealthy conditions.<sup>[51]</sup> Brigadier General Nathaniel Michler was tasked to propose solutions to address these concerns. He proposed abandoning the use of the White House as a residence and designed a new estate for the first family at Meridian Hill in Washington, D.C., but Congress rejected the plan.<sup>[51]</sup> Another site under consideration was Metropolis View, today the campus of The Catholic University of America.<sup>[52]</sup>

When Chester A. Arthur took office in 1881, he ordered renovations to the White House to take place as soon as the recently widowed Lucretia Garfield moved out. Arthur inspected the work almost nightly and made several suggestions. Louis Comfort Tiffany was asked to send selected designers to assist. Over twenty wagonloads of furniture and household items were removed from the building and sold at a public auction.<sup>[53]</sup> All that was saved were bust portraits of John Adams and Martin Van Buren.<sup>[54]</sup> A proposal was made to build a new residence south of the White House, but it failed to gain support.

In the fall of 1882 work was done on the main corridor, including tinting the walls pale olive and adding squares of gold leaf, and decorating the ceiling in gold and silver, and colorful traceries woven to spell "USA". The Red Room was painted a dull Pomeranian red, and its ceiling was decorated with gold, silver, and copper stars and stripes of red, white, and blue. A fifty-foot jeweled Tiffany glass screen, supported by imitation marble columns, replaced the glass doors that separated the main corridor from the north vestibule.<sup>[55][56]</sup>

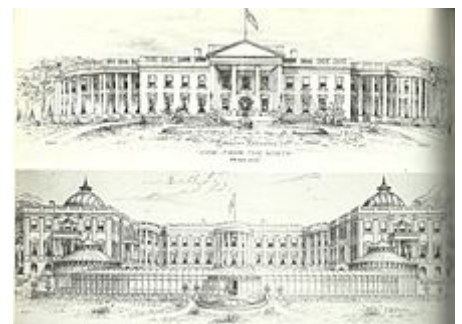
In 1891, First Lady Caroline Harrison proposed major extensions to the White House, including a National Wing on the east for a historical art gallery, and a wing on the west for official functions.<sup>[51]</sup> A plan was devised by Colonel Theodore A. Bingham, which reflected the Harrison proposal.<sup>[51]</sup> These plans were ultimately rejected.

However, in 1902 Theodore Roosevelt hired McKim, Mead & White to carry out expansions and renovations in a neoclassical style suited to the building's architecture, removing the Tiffany screen and all Victorian additions.<sup>[57][58]</sup> Charles McKim himself designed and managed the project, which gave more living space to the president's large family by removing a staircase in the West Hall and moving executive office staff from the second floor of the residence into the new West Wing.<sup>[25]</sup>

President William Howard Taft enlisted the help of architect Nathan C. Wyeth to add additional space to the West Wing, which included the addition of the Oval Office.<sup>[51]</sup> In 1925, Congress enacted legislation allowing the White House to accept gifts of furniture and art for the first time.<sup>[59]:17</sup> The West Wing was damaged by fire on Christmas Eve 1929; Herbert Hoover and his aides moved back into it on April 14, 1930.<sup>[60]</sup> In the 1930s, a second story was added, as well as a larger basement for White House staff, and President Franklin Roosevelt had the Oval Office moved to its present location: adjacent to the Rose Garden.<sup>[25]</sup>



Entrance Hall in 1882, showing the new Tiffany glass screen



Additions proposed by architect Frederick D. Owen (1901)



The North Lawn during the Lincoln administration

## Truman reconstruction



Truman reconstruction, 1949–1952.  
A steel structure is built within the exterior shell.

Decades of poor maintenance, the construction of a fourth story attic during the Coolidge administration, and the addition of a second-floor balcony over the south portico for Harry S. Truman<sup>[61]</sup> took a great toll on the brick and sandstone structure built around a timber frame.<sup>[25]</sup> By 1948, the house was declared to be in imminent danger of collapse, forcing President Truman to commission a reconstruction and to live across the street at Blair House from 1949 to 1951.<sup>[62]</sup> The work, done by the firm of Philadelphia contractor John McShain, required the complete dismantling of the interior spaces, construction of a new load-bearing internal steel frame and the reconstruction of the original rooms within the new structure.<sup>[61]</sup> The total cost of the renovations was about \$5.7 million (\$57 million in 2020).<sup>[63]</sup> Some modifications to the floor plan were made, the largest being the repositioning of the grand staircase to open into the Entrance Hall, rather than the Cross Hall.<sup>[61]</sup> Central air conditioning was added, as well as two additional sub-basements providing space for workrooms, storage, and a bomb shelter.<sup>[25]</sup> The Trumans moved back into the White House on March 27, 1952.<sup>[25]</sup> While the house's structure was kept intact by the Truman reconstruction, much of the new interior finishes were generic, and of little historic value. Much of the original plasterwork, some dating back to the 1814–1816 rebuilding, was too

damaged to reinstall, as was the original robust Beaux Arts paneling in the East Room. President Truman had the original timber frame sawn into paneling; the walls of the Vermeil Room, Library, China Room, and Map Room on the ground floor of the main residence were paneled in wood from the timbers.<sup>[64]</sup>

## Jacqueline Kennedy restoration

Jacqueline Kennedy, wife of President John F. Kennedy (1961–63), directed a very extensive and historic redecoration of the house. She enlisted the help of Henry Francis du Pont of the Winterthur Museum to assist in collecting artifacts for the mansion, many of which had once been housed there.<sup>[65]</sup> Other antiques, fine paintings, and improvements of the Kennedy period were donated to the White House by wealthy philanthropists, including the Crowninshield family, Jane Engelhard, Jayne Wrightsman, and the Oppenheimer family.

Stéphane Boudin of the House of Jansen, a Paris interior-design firm that had been recognized worldwide, was employed by Jacqueline Kennedy to assist with the decoration.<sup>[65]</sup> Different periods of the early republic and world history were selected as a theme for each room: the Federal style for the Green Room, French Empire for the Blue Room, American Empire for the Red Room, Louis XVI for the Yellow Oval Room, and Victorian for the president's study, renamed the Treaty Room. Antique furniture was acquired, and decorative fabric and trim based on period documents was produced and installed. The Kennedy restoration resulted in a more authentic White House of grander stature, which recalled the French taste of Madison and Monroe.<sup>[65]</sup> In the Diplomatic Reception Room, Mrs. Kennedy installed an antique "Vue de l'Amérique Nord" wallpaper which Zuber & Cie had designed in 1834.



The Red Room as designed by Stéphane Boudin during the presidency of John F. Kennedy

The wallpaper had hung previously on the walls of another mansion until 1961 when that house was demolished for a grocery store. Just before the demolition, the wallpaper was salvaged and sold to the White House.

The first White House guidebook was produced under the direction of curator Lorraine Waxman Pearce with direct supervision from Mrs. Kennedy.<sup>[66]</sup> Sale of the guidebook helped finance the restoration.

Kennedy showed her restoration of the White House to the public in a televised tour of the house on Valentine's Day in 1962.<sup>[67]</sup>

## The White House since the Kennedy restoration

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The White House complex and vicinity, viewed from the north with the Potomac River, Jefferson Memorial and Washington Monument to the south

Congress enacted legislation in September 1961 declaring the White House a museum. Furniture, fixtures, and decorative arts could now be declared either historic or of artistic interest by the president. This prevented them from being sold (as many objects in the executive mansion had been in the past 150 years). When not in use or display at the White House, these items were to be turned over to the Smithsonian Institution for preservation, study, storage, or exhibition. The White House retains the right to have these items returned.<sup>[59]:29</sup>

Out of respect for the historic character of the White House, no substantive architectural changes have been made to the house since the Truman renovation.<sup>[68]</sup> Since the Kennedy restoration, every presidential family has made some changes to the

private quarters of the White House, but the Committee for the Preservation of the White House must approve any modifications to the State Rooms. Charged with maintaining the historical integrity of the White House, the congressionally-authorized committee works with each First Family – usually represented by the first lady, the White House curator, and the chief usher – to implement the family's proposals for altering the house.<sup>[69]</sup>

During the Nixon Administration (1969–1974), First Lady Pat Nixon refurbished the Green Room, Blue Room, and Red Room, working with Clement Conger, the curator appointed by President Richard Nixon.<sup>[70]</sup> Mrs. Nixon's efforts brought more than 600 artifacts to the house, the largest acquisition by any administration.<sup>[71]</sup> Her husband created the modern press briefing room over Franklin Roosevelt's old swimming pool.<sup>[72]</sup> Nixon also added a single-lane bowling alley to the White House basement.<sup>[73]</sup>

Computers and the first laser printer were added during the Carter administration, and the use of computer technology was expanded during the Reagan administration.<sup>[74]</sup> A Carter-era innovation, a set of solar water heating panels that were mounted on the roof of the White House, was removed during Reagan's presidency.<sup>[75][76]</sup> Redecorations were made to the private family quarters and maintenance was made to public areas during the Reagan years.<sup>[77]</sup> The house was accredited as a museum in 1988.<sup>[77]</sup>

In the 1990s, Bill and Hillary Clinton refurbished some rooms with the assistance of Arkansas decorator Kaki Hockersmith, including the Oval Office, the East Room, Blue Room, State Dining Room, Lincoln Bedroom, and Lincoln Sitting Room.<sup>[78]</sup> During the administration of George W. Bush, First Lady Laura Bush refurbished the Lincoln Bedroom in a style contemporary with the Lincoln era; the Green Room, Cabinet Room, and theater were also refurbished.<sup>[78]</sup>

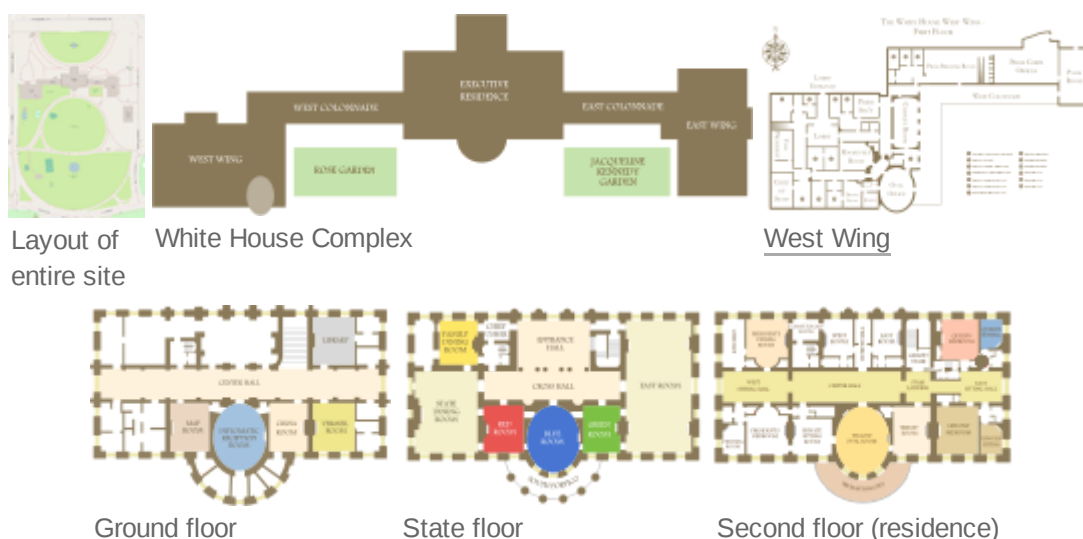


The White House became one of the first wheelchair-accessible government buildings in Washington when modifications were made during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who used a wheelchair because of his paralytic illness. In the 1990s, Hillary Clinton, at the suggestion of Visitors Office Director Melinda N. Bates, approved the addition of a ramp in the East Wing corridor. It allowed easy wheelchair access for the public tours and special events that enter through the secure entrance building on the east side.

In 2003, the Bush administration reinstalled solar thermal heaters.<sup>[76]</sup> These units are used to heat water for landscape maintenance personnel and for the presidential pool and spa. One hundred sixty-seven solar photovoltaic grid-tied panels were installed at the same time on the roof of the maintenance facility. The changes were not publicized as a White House spokeswoman said the changes were an internal matter. The story was picked up by industry trade journals.<sup>[79]</sup> In 2013, President Barack Obama had a set of solar panels installed on the roof of the White House, making it the first time solar power would be used for the president's living quarters.<sup>[80][81]</sup>

## Layout and amenities

Today the group of buildings housing the presidency is known as the White House Complex. It includes the central Executive Residence flanked by the East Wing and West Wing. The Chief Usher coordinates day to day household operations. The White House includes six stories and 55,000 square feet (5,100 m<sup>2</sup>) of floor space, 132 rooms and 35 bathrooms, 412 doors, 147 windows, twenty-eight fireplaces, eight staircases, three elevators, five full-time chefs, a tennis court, a (single-lane) bowling alley, a movie theater (officially called the White House Family Theater<sup>[82]</sup>), a jogging track, a swimming pool, and a putting green.<sup>[35]</sup> It receives up to 30,000 visitors each week.<sup>[83]</sup>



## Executive Residence

The original residence is in the center. Two colonnades – one on the east and one on the west – designed by Jefferson, now serve to connect the East and West Wings added later. The Executive Residence houses the president's dwelling, as well as rooms for ceremonies and official entertaining. The State Floor of the residence building includes the East Room, Green Room, Blue Room, Red Room, State Dining Room, Family Dining Room, Cross Hall, Entrance Hall, and Grand Staircase.<sup>[84]</sup> The Ground Floor is made up of the Diplomatic Reception Room, Map Room, China Room, Vermeil Room, Library, the main kitchen, and other offices.<sup>[85]</sup> The second floor family residence includes the Yellow Oval Room, East and West Sitting Halls, the White House Master Bedroom, President's Dining Room, the Treaty Room, Lincoln Bedroom and Queens'



Bedroom, as well as two additional bedrooms, a smaller kitchen, and a private dressing room.<sup>[86]</sup> The third floor consists of the White House Solarium, Game Room, Linen Room, a Diet Kitchen, and another sitting room (previously used as President George W. Bush's workout room).<sup>[87]</sup>

## West Wing

The West Wing houses the president's office (the Oval Office) and offices of his senior staff, with room for about 50 employees. It also includes the Cabinet Room, where the president conducts business meetings and where the Cabinet meets,<sup>[88]</sup> as well as the White House Situation Room, James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, and Roosevelt Room.<sup>[89]</sup> In 2007, work was completed on renovations of the press briefing room, adding fiber optic cables and LCD screens for the display of charts and graphs.<sup>[90]</sup> The makeover took 11 months and cost of \$8 million, out of which news outlets paid \$2 million.<sup>[90]</sup> In September 2010, a two-year project began on the West Wing, creating a multistory underground structure.<sup>[91]</sup>

Some members of the President's staff are located in the adjacent Eisenhower Executive Office Building, until 1999 called the Old Executive Office Building, and historically the State War and Navy building.<sup>[90]</sup>

The Oval Office, Roosevelt Room, and other portions of the West Wing were partially replicated on a sound stage and used as the setting for *The West Wing* television show.<sup>[92]</sup>

## East Wing

The East Wing, which contains additional office space, was added to the White House in 1942. Among its uses, the East Wing has intermittently housed the offices and staff of the first lady, and the White House Social Office. Rosalynn Carter, in 1977, was the first to place her personal office in the East Wing and to formally call it the "Office of the First Lady". The East Wing was built during World War II in order to hide the construction of an underground bunker to be used in emergencies. The bunker has come to be known as the Presidential Emergency Operations Center.

## Grounds

The White House and grounds cover just over 18 acres (about 7.3 hectares). Before the construction of the North Portico, most public events were entered from the South Lawn, the grading and planting of which was ordered by Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson also drafted a planting plan for the North Lawn that included large trees that would have mostly obscured the house from Pennsylvania Avenue. During the mid-to-late 19th century a series of ever larger greenhouses were built on the west side of the house, where the current West Wing is located. During this period, the North Lawn was planted with ornate carpet-style flowerbeds. The general layout of the White House grounds today is based on the 1935 design by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. of the Olmsted Brothers firm, commissioned by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. During the Kennedy administration, the White House Rose Garden was redesigned by Rachel Lambert Mellon. The Rose Garden borders the West Colonnade. Bordering the East Colonnade is the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden, which was begun by Jacqueline Kennedy but completed after her husband's assassination. On the weekend of June 23, 2006, a century-old American Elm (*Ulmus americana* L.) tree on the north side of the building came down during one of the many storms amid intense flooding. Among the oldest trees on the grounds are several magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*) planted by Andrew Jackson, including the Jackson Magnolia, reportedly grown from a sprout taken from the favorite tree of Jackson's recently deceased wife, the sprout planted after Jackson moved into the White House. The tree stood for over 200 years; but in 2017, having become too weak to stand on its own, it was decided it should be removed and replaced with one of its offspring.<sup>[93][94]</sup>

Michelle Obama planted the White House's first organic garden and installed beehives on the South Lawn of the White House, which will supply organic produce and honey to the First Family and for state dinners and other official gatherings.<sup>[95]</sup> In 2020, First Lady Melania Trump redesigned the Rose Garden.



The Cross Hall, Marine One View from the south,  
connecting the State prepares to land on with south fountain  
Dining Room and the the South Lawn,  
East Room on the where State Arrival  
State Floor Ceremonies are  
held.



View from the north, with White House at night,  
north fountain view from the north

## Public access and security

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### Historical accessibility

Like the English and Irish country houses it was modeled on, the White House was, from the start, open to the public until the early part of the 20th century. President Thomas Jefferson held an open house for his second inaugural in 1805, and many of the people at his swearing-in ceremony at the Capitol followed him home, where he greeted them in the Blue Room. Those open houses sometimes became rowdy: in 1829, President Andrew Jackson had to leave for a hotel when roughly 20,000 citizens celebrated his inauguration inside the White House. His aides ultimately had to lure the mob outside with washtubs filled with a potent cocktail of orange juice and whiskey.<sup>[96]</sup> Even so, the practice continued until 1885, when newly elected Grover Cleveland arranged for a presidential review of the troops from a grandstand in front of the White House instead of the traditional open house. Inspired by Washington's open houses in New York and Philadelphia, John Adams began the tradition of the White House New Year's Reception.<sup>[97]</sup> Jefferson also permitted public tours of his house, which have continued ever since, except during wartime, and began the tradition of annual reception on the Fourth of July. Those receptions ended in the early 1930s, although President Bill Clinton briefly revived the New Year's Day open house in his first term.

### Aviation incidents

In February 1974, a stolen army helicopter landed without authorization on the White House's grounds.<sup>[98]</sup> Twenty years later, in 1994, a light plane flown by Frank Eugene Corder crashed on the White House grounds, and he died instantly.<sup>[99]</sup>

As a result of increased security regarding air traffic in the capital, the White House was evacuated in May 2005 before an unauthorized aircraft could approach the grounds.<sup>[100]</sup>

## Closure of Pennsylvania Avenue



A uniformed US Secret Service Agent on Pennsylvania Avenue

On May 20, 1995, primarily as a response to the Oklahoma City bombing of April 19, 1995, the United States Secret Service closed off Pennsylvania Avenue to vehicular traffic in front of the White House from the eastern edge of Lafayette Park to 17th Street. Later, the closure was extended an additional block to the east to 15th Street, and East Executive Avenue, a small street between the White House and the Treasury Building.

After September 11, 2001, this change was made permanent in addition to closing E Street between the South Portico of the White House and the Ellipse.<sup>[101]</sup> In response to the Boston Marathon bombing, the road was closed to the public in its entirety for a period of two days.

The Pennsylvania Avenue closing has been opposed by organized civic groups in Washington, D.C. They argue that the closing impedes traffic flow unnecessarily and is inconsistent with the well-conceived historic plan for the city. As for security considerations, they note that the White House is set much farther back from the street than numerous other sensitive federal

buildings are.<sup>[102]</sup>

Prior to its inclusion within the fenced compound that now includes the Old Executive Office Building to the west and the Treasury Building to the east, this sidewalk served as a queuing area for the daily public tours of the White House. These tours were suspended in the wake of the September 11 attacks. In September 2003, they resumed on a limited basis for groups making prior arrangements through their Congressional representatives or embassies in Washington for foreign nationals and submitting to background checks, but the White House remained closed to the public.<sup>[103]</sup> White House tours were suspended for most of 2013 due to budget constraints after sequestration.<sup>[104]</sup> The White House reopened to the public in November 2013.<sup>[105]</sup>

## Protection

The White House Complex is protected by the United States Secret Service and the United States Park Police.

NASAMS (Norwegian Advanced Surface to Air Missile System) were used to guard air space over Washington, D.C. during the 2005 presidential inauguration. The same NASAMS units have since been used to protect the president and all airspace around the White House, which is strictly prohibited to aircraft.<sup>[106][107]</sup>



For security reasons, the section of Pennsylvania Avenue on the north side of the White House is closed to all vehicular traffic, except government officials.

North front of the White House on the reverse (back) of the U.S. \$20 bill.

## See also

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- [Camp David](#)
- [Pedro Casanave](#)
- [Germantown White House](#)
- [Graphics and Calligraphy Office](#)
- [List of largest houses in the United States](#)
- [List of National Historic Landmarks in Washington, D.C.](#)
- [List of residences of presidents of the United States](#)
- [Number One Observatory Circle](#), residence of the Vice President
- [Reported White House ghosts](#)
- [White House Acquisition Trust](#)
- [White House Chief Calligrapher](#)
- [White House Chief Floral Designer](#)
- [White House Christmas tree](#)
- [White House Communications Agency](#)
- [White House Endowment Trust](#)
- [White House Executive Chef](#)
- [White House Fellows](#)
- [White House History](#)
- [White House Social Secretary](#)
- [Category:Rooms in the White House](#)
- [White House COVID-19 outbreak](#)

## Notes

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- a. L'Enfant identified himself as "Peter Charles L'Enfant" during most of his life while residing in the United States. He wrote this name on his "[Plan of the city intended for the permanent seat of the government of t\(he\) United States ...](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3850.ct000512)" (<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3850.ct000512>) (Washington, D.C.) and on other legal documents. However, during the early 1900s, a French ambassador to the US, [Jean Jules Jusserand](#), popularized the use of L'Enfant's birth name, "Pierre Charles L'Enfant". (Reference: Bowling, Kenneth R (2002). *Peter Charles L'Enfant*:



vision, honor, and male friendship in the early American Republic. George Washington University, Washington, D.C. ISBN 978-0-9727611-0-9). The United States Code states in 40 U.S.C. § 3309 (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/40/3309>): "(a) In General. – The purposes of this chapter shall be carried out in the District of Columbia as nearly as may be practicable in harmony with the plan of Peter Charles L'Enfant." The National Park Service identifies L'Enfant as "Major Peter Charles L'Enfant (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/Wash/ext.htm#washington>)" and as "Major Pierre (Peter) Charles L'Enfant ([https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/washington\\_monument.html](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/washington_monument.html))" on its website.

b. Sources disagree<sup>[22]</sup>

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## External links

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- [Official website \(https://www.whitehouse.gov\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov) 
- The White House Historical Association (<http://www.whitehousehistory.org/>), with historical photos, online tours and exhibits, timelines, and facts
- President's Park (White House) (<http://www.nps.gov/whho/>) part of the [National Park Service](#)
- [The White House Museum \(http://www.whitehousemuseum.org/\)](http://www.whitehousemuseum.org/), a detailed online tour
  - [Detailed 3D computer model \(http://www.whitehousemuseum.org/model/\)](http://www.whitehousemuseum.org/model/) of White House and grounds
- Video tours:
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