

White House Celebrates Christmas Through Eyes of a Child



November 27, 2023 by [Dan McCue](#)



WASHINGTON — The White House kicked off the Christmas season this week by debuting a spectacular presentation of the “magic, wonder and joy” of the holiday through the eyes of a child.

Anyone familiar with the traditional White House tour of the east side of the president’s home and office complex will recognize many of the rooms captured in the accompanying photo gallery (see below).

According to the White House, it took over 300 volunteers from across the country a full week to decorate the building inside and out, with the East Room, State Dining Room, library and five

other rooms serving as the canvas upon which a true Christmas spectacular is wrought.

First Lady Dr. Jill Biden officially unveiled the mansion's holiday decor Monday afternoon, inviting National Guard families to be the first members of the general public to see it.

After delivering her holiday message, the children of National Guard families, as well as local military families, will be treated to a special performance by the cast of the North American tour of Disney's stage musical "Frozen."

In a welcome message at the beginning of the commemorative 2023 White House holiday guide, she and President Biden encouraged those who do visit the executive mansion during the holiday season to embrace their inner child and "delight in simply being present with those [they] love."

"It is a time for our senses to awaken — for each of us to smell the aroma of favorite family recipes, to hear the warmth of a dear friend's voice, to see the glow of lights and decorations, to taste the sweetness of candies and treats, and to feel the quiet stillness and strength of faith," the first couple said.

In closing, they said, "May the memories made here remind us all of the blessing that is our nation."

All told, the White House expects more than 100,000 visitors to come and view the display during the holiday season.

When they arrive, they will be brought in through the East Wing of the White House, entering under the branches of an ornate Christmas tree, the first of 98 such trees set up throughout the complex.

The first Christmas tree featured inside the White House, the Gold Star tree, is adorned with wooden ornaments that are engraved with the names of fallen service members.

The marble arches of the Ground Floor Corridor are sprinkled with holiday messages sent from Americans across the country to the president and first lady.

Also on the Ground Floor Corridor is the first nod to the 200th Anniversary of the publication of “‘Twas the Night Before Christmas.” The Library of Congress provided a sampling of editions from the last 200 years to the White House, displayed in cases for visitors to remember and enjoy. The historic poem is also celebrated in the design of the Gingerbread White House upstairs.

The library honors the tradition and magic of bedtime stories during the holiday season. Golden moons and shimmering stars are suspended above, with treasured holiday storybooks throughout the peaceful scene. Santa and his sleigh are seen through the window, flying past a full moon on his way to the White House.

The decor of the Vermeil Room (French for gilded silver) represents the joy of music and performance during the holidays. At the center of the room is a mechanical theater creation, with rotating U.S. Marine Band figures entertaining guests with herald trumpets. The mantel is graced with sculpted ballerinas, spinning out of music boxes.

Next comes the China Room, which has been transformed for the season into a holiday sweet shop with holiday cakes, cookies and gingerbread dominating the space.

Piles of cooking supplies and baking ingredients are also on hand, intended to remind guests of familiar recipes that bring generations of families together year after year during the holidays.

From there, guests will head upstairs to the East Room, where a variety of Advent calendars are counting down the days until Christmas.

As the largest room in the White House, the East Room has hosted public receptions, ceremonies, bill signings and other memorable occasions. It also includes Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington, which First Lady Dolley Madison helped save in 1814 when the White House was about to be set aflame during the War of 1812.

The East Room also features a Neapolitan crèche, or Nativity scene, with over 40 figurines, most dating back to the 18th century. The crèche has been displayed during every White House holiday season since 1967.

The Green Room is decorated in glowing candles and stained glass, which the Bidens say are meant to symbolize "the peace, strength and joy we find in faith."

Colorful orchids, the first lady's favorites, and holiday florals are incorporated throughout the room.

The Blue Room showcases the official White House Christmas tree, an 18½-foot Fraser fir from Fleetwood, North Carolina. A bit of trivia is pertinent here — every year, the Blue Room's chandelier is removed to accommodate the Christmas tree's full height.

This year's official White House Christmas tree was presented to the first lady by siblings Amber Scott and Alex Church of Cline

Church Nursery, the 2023 Grand Champion Grower in the National Christmas Tree Association's annual contest.

In addition to the magnificence of the tree itself, visitors are sure to appreciate the replica of a vintage passenger train, on loan from the Train Collectors Association, that weaves its way through the tree's base.

The decor of the Red Room represents the joy of making holiday crafts together. As part of the first lady's Joining Forces initiative to support military and veteran families, caregivers and survivors, the ornaments in this room were created out of the handprints and painted family portraits of military-connected children, ensuring that military and veteran families can see themselves and their talents reflected in this year's holiday display.

A Red Room tradition since 1975, fresh cranberries are integrated into the decor as topiary forms. Marking a new twist to the time-honored tradition are cranberry red beads incorporated into the room's handmade popcorn garland.

The State Dining Room is Santa's Workshop itself, with elves' workbenches, stools and ladders circling the Christmas trees, with tools and gifts-in-progress filling out the decor.

Life-sized nutcrackers and dancing ballerinas flank the Christmas trees and reside within the window wells, with festive ribbons and gift tags lining the fireplace.

An engraving on the mantel reads, "I Pray Heaven To Bestow The Best of Blessings On This House." The words were taken from a letter written by President John Adams to his wife, Abigail, dated Nov. 2, 1800.

These words are now known as the White House blessing.

The Cross Hall unites the State Rooms of the White House, with the East Room and State Dining Room at the opposite ends, and the Green, Blue and Red Rooms opening from the south side.

The slightly arched ceiling springs from the cast plaster molding designed during the Theodore Roosevelt renovation of 1902.

During the holidays, the Cross Hall features the official White House Menorah, created in 2021 by the White House Executive Residence Carpentry Shop. The menorah was constructed using wood that was removed more than 70 years ago during the Truman-era renovation of the White House.

Closing out this year's White House holiday display is an incredible, eye-catching recreation of "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" in the Grand Foyer.

As one walks out of the building, they pass directly beneath Santa's sleigh and reindeer, who are suspended in the air before the presidential seal.

For those who love the statistics behind the beauty and inspiration of the annual holiday display, here are but a few:

According to the White House, over 142,425 holiday lights decorate the trees, garlands, wreaths and displays throughout and around the complex.

Approximately 14,975 feet of ribbon, over 350 candles, over 33,892 ornaments and over 22,100 bells were also used in this year's display.

As for the Gingerbread White House, we're told the creation includes 40 sheets of sugar cookie dough, 40 sheets of gingerbread dough, 90 pounds of pastillage, 30 pounds of chocolate and 50 pounds of royal icing.

Finally, a total of 72 wreaths adorn the north and south facades of the White House.

In other Christmas-related news: On Thursday, the president and first lady will participate in the lighting of the National Christmas trees in President's Park off Pennsylvania Avenue.

Vice President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff will also be in attendance.

The ceremony, first celebrated in 1923, is co-presented by the National Park Service and the National Park Foundation.

The National Christmas Tree is a living Colorado blue spruce from Pennsylvania, which can be seen year-round in the park. Fifty-six smaller trees surrounding it are decorated for Christmas with one-of-a-kind ornaments representing every U.S. state and territory plus the District of Columbia.

The ceremony, which features a number of musical performances, is being taped for broadcast by CBS television. It'll be shown nationally on Dec. 15 at 8 p.m. EST.

For those in the Washington, D.C., area who can't wait for the national tree lighting, the U.S. Capitol Christmas tree lighting ceremony will be held Tuesday evening on the West Front Lawn of the Capitol.

As **previously reported** by The Well News, this year's tree comes from the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia.

The Capitol Christmas tree has been a tradition since 1964.

Finally, for those with history buffs to give gifts to this holiday season, the White House Historical Association is holding its Annual Holiday Book Festival on Friday, Dec. 1, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

More than 20 authors of popular and award-winning White House Historical Association titles will be on hand to sign their books.

In addition, the artist Peter Waddell will be at work painting a historical scene of the White House throughout the day, and artist John Hutton will offer lessons on how to draw the presidents, throughout the day. Both will also be signing books.

Upon arrival, the public will be greeted by President Thomas Jefferson (as portrayed by historical actor-interpreter Bill Barker of Monticello).

The event is being held at the White House History Shop, located at 1610 H Street N.W.

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(All photos in the gallery by Dan McCue)

