

## BILL HIXSON DECORATING AT THE WHITE HOUSE FOR CHRISTMAS 2010

Last year because of the new White House flower shop personnel change I was not asked back to assist in the Christmas decorating. I was honored to be asked this year to be in charge in charge of decorating the East room. As such I was able to supply the beautiful round hand painted church and sleigh balls and winter sport balls for the private quarters tree upstairs. The girls received glass white mitten ornaments. Downstairs I once again was able to hide the pickle, Pig and frog as well as bird nests on the trees

This year the White House was beautifully decorated with many more trees and decorations than last year. The overall theme was "Simple Gifts." The entranceway where guests arrive was flanked by evergreen trees and once inside all are charmed by the heavy magnolia green and brown leaf garlands, garland of oak leaf rosettes and many more gracing the private offices flanking the walkway in. In these natural materials the bounty of the American outdoors is showcased.

At the landing a military tree is placed prominently ( by the way our red white and blue patriotic balls are on the tree.) Gingerbread cookie ornaments made by service member's children are on wreaths and garlands.

As guests proceed through the ground floor corridor they pass unusual frames, ovals, diamonds, huge in size, covered with gourds or fruit, even thousands of Chinese lantern orange balls. These unique designs are placed in each of the windows as you follow the walkway.

Each of the public rooms on the lower floor of the White House has a mantel holding a heavily decorated garland.. In the Vermeil Room peach, gold and amber colors are used on the tree as well as the mantel A musical theme is carried with the many small instruments placed on trees and garland.

This year is the first year I have seen a dinner table set in the China Room. Plates from the Reagan and Clintons are complimented by a beautiful fresh floral design.

The Diplomatic room , where President FDR gave his fireside chats to the public during World War Two, is accented with two trees and mantel in red, sage green almost gray packages and ornaments.

Upstairs in the State Dining Room the Lincoln portrait is flanked by two trees featuring gold, copper and dark brown glass pine cones. ( Check our selection..) Each of the wall sconces suspend an orb of fresh Salal leaves and glistening gold leaves with a drop of ribbon.. The garland surrounding the painting of Lincoln , above the mantel, is made of salal and gold leaves too.

The Gingerbread House on the tier table in the State Dining Room is magnificently done. Miniature rooms with trees and décor are featured for the first time.. It takes about four days to produce this huge favorite decoration.

Leaving the State room next is the small Red Room. I believe it had the most lovely decorated mantel garland. The colors were, wine, burgundy , deep red and very, very rich in effect. Two 8 foot trees repeated the color theme. Over the many years a small 3 foot cranberry tree produced by my friend Myrtle Elmore has been a welcoming addition to this room. Myrtle was not here so another cranberry open frame orb was featured.

Next is the round Blue Room. Here we find the most famous tree in the White House. This is the tree seen being brought on a horse drawn cart each year. The chandelier of the room is removed so the tree can touch the ceiling. This year the Douglas fir tree is from Crystal Spring Tree Farm in Leighton , Pennsylvania. The tree is decorated by items made by the Savannah College of Art and Design. Several huge sheaves of wheat are placed prominently on the tree announcing the fact that the theme is one of agriculture. Each state has a ribbon rosette with depiction of it's main product featured.

The next room is the Green Room. A quiet green theme of glass balls and ribbon grace the mantel. The unusual décor in this room is the use of recycled magazines, newspapers, papers that form two 7 foot trees. The papers are partial ones heavily glittered and hundreds form the trees. Small magazines are diagonally cut, partially opened to form small tree shapes and they too are completely glitter. Grafts and reuse of material form these 1940 style decorations. If you wait long enough every thing old is new to new generations. ( I am waiting for skinny ties to come back into vogue again!)

Outside in the Cross Hall 4 foot urns and pedestals hold frosted glass glittered birch branches that spray out to the ceiling. Dramatic! Two tall evergreen trees are bedecked in red, gold and silver. Huge snowflakes are pushed deep into places where the trees were not perfect and so form shadow box effects. At the base of the Grand Staircase leading from the private quarters upstairs thousands of hand fashioned ribbon poinsettias are woven into the garland framing the stairs. I did not know that twenty years ago when I first taught the crew then how to make them that I would see new people doing them for the first time. ( When I first opened my shop in 1952 my mother used satin ribbon to make them for us to use, At that time the only things we had as décor for the holiday was white glittered birch tree branches, Styrofoam and a celluloid deer.)

The last room is the East Room. It is here where the musical and dramatic events as well as where the reporters usually await the President. This year I was asked by Laura Dowling, the new head of the Floral Department, where I would like to be in charge, I replied that I always like the East Room. We used four trees, Douglass Fir, adorned with many peacocks, blue, green, violet glass baubles and ribbons of similar colors. We provided clear glass balls to spark up the colors as blues and violets are receding colors. We garlanded very broad cloth like ribbons first on the trees, made huge roses of the cloth ribbon ( 48 for each tree), and used the roses at the apex of the garlands. An artist from Michigan made six lifelike full size peacocks, four of which were placed near then tops of the trees. The remaining 2 birds we placed on the entranceway garland.. The birds were of natural dried plant materials and although beautifully done when placed at such heights they did not display their artistry. With Laura Dowling's assent I placed one bird high at the top left of the garland and placed the other asymmetrically lower right on the garland. So all could really admire the workmanship. The mantels and their mirror's wreaths above used the smaller peacocks and materials that matched the tree décor.

All of this year' décor was effective and much liked. The dinner and reception they give us after everything is finished takes place the following day. Crowds of people and fine food , music and a wonderful time meeting the Presidents wife. Lots more to remember and tell.

Merry and blessed Christmas to you!