

The White House: A Pop-Up Book

Chuck Fischer

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In cooperation with the White House Historical Association, the author has crafted a visual delight that draws from historical accountings, personalities, and architectural intricacies.

The tour begins with a Fourth of July celebration and an open invitation to take a personal stroll through the magnificent history of a country and its remarkable leaders. As if First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy herself were repeating her famous televised White House tour, Fischer has captured her profound love of history and her devotion to keeping the spirit of the past in the forefront, through a series of visual pop-ups, pull-outs, and informative mini-booklets. Fischer leaves no white space: every page is primed for maximum educational value, and personal touches give the feel of a private tour.

As the reader peels the Official Seal from the full-length portrait of George Washington, familiar cameos of the U.S. presidents are revealed in sequential order. Perhaps most striking is the portrait of John F. Kennedy with head bowed. Constructed in the book's center is a scaled pop-up of the White House exterior and a fold-out flap with a close-up view of the Oval Office. With a turn of the page, an elaborate, pleated fan unfolds, adorned with the commissioned portraits of the nation's First Ladies. A double-sided, accordion-pleated booklet relates the tradition of the unveiling of the First Lady's inaugural gown, along with a compilation of their names and dates; the reverse side showcases these exquisite gowns.

The White House is as charming as it is enriching. Another fold-out surprises the reader with a fully decorated Christmas tree, while the outside panel tells about Theodore Roosevelt, a noted conservationist, and his refusal to allow cut trees in the house. As if to whisper a secret into the reader's ear, Fischer mentions the year when the presidential children smuggled a tree into the attic's sewing room.

Fischer is the author and illustrator of *Great American Houses and Gardens: A Pop-Up Book* and *Wallcoverings: Applying the Language of Color and Pattern*. His wallcovering and fabric designs are in the permanent collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, and he has recently been a Visiting Artist at the American Academy in Rome. Here, he accurately translates the experience of a personalized White House tour into a three-dimensional exploration of the nation's most valued symbol of freedom and its leadership.

Fischer's strength in the pop-up format energizes the dry, dust-laden history of past decades recorded in today's history books and pumps life into the veins of a nation's vibrant story—a powerful tool for all ages and all classrooms. While the illustrations are fairly delicate, the book's well-crafted construction should fare well with careful, supervised use.

CHARISSE FLOYD (August 18, 2009)

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