

Laura Dowling

Laura Dowling served as Chief Floral Designer at the White House for six years from 2009 until 2015. As creative director for flowers and décor, she managed White House floral design for thousands of official and private events, including state dinners, parties, receptions and large-scale installations, such as the Fourth of July, Halloween and the iconic White House Christmas. Her lush and lively floral creations also graced the White House state rooms, East and West Wing offices, Camp David and the Presidential private residence. As Chief Floral Designer, Laura launched innovative strategic partnerships with the nation's top artists and designers, White House policy staff and the Office of Science and Technology (OSTP) and Presidential Innovation Fellows, creating imaginative, cutting-edge décor and flowers.

The art of floral diplomacy. Laura's unique approach focuses on the premise that flowers can be more than just decorative objects, conveying important diplomatic messages, cultural meaning and symbolic metaphor. Floral Diplomacy, the art of honoring visiting dignitaries through floral symbolism that articulates compelling artistic and strategic themes, became a signature initiative during Laura's time at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Her first book, *Floral Diplomacy at the White House* (March 2017), describes her approach for creating inspiring White House flower and décor, while *A White House Christmas (including floral design tutorials)* (October 2017), gives readers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into decorating the White House for Christmas, an elaborate process that involves 55+ trees, miles of garland, dozens of wreaths, and over 100 volunteers working on special hand-made projects and décor. Her third book *Wreaths* (with how-to tutorials) (October 2018) launched a new series of floral and design books. Laura's new *Bouquets*, scheduled for release in early 2020, features 75 how-to designs illustrating innovative floral styles and techniques.

A new garden style. Laura is known for her contemporary and romantic style of flower arrangement featuring a free interplay between flowers, floral boughs and branches, berried twigs and leafy vines, combined with more formally designed bouquets. Inspiration is taken from the splendor of abundant gardens, balancing artistic vision with the beauty and free form of nature. At the White House,

Laura created a variety of garden style arrangements, some in hand-made natural fiber containers. Her innovative approach resulted in beautifully sophisticated, seasonal designs that were at once modern and classically refined.

A spirit of collaboration. During her White House tenure, Laura oversaw an expanded volunteer citizens program that opened the White House flower shop to hundreds of people from across the country. This effort built an extraordinarily talented team of volunteer floral ambassadors that helped increase the capacity of the White House flower program, while enhancing engagement and producing inspiring designs and creative results.

A story of inspiration. In 2000, Laura was inspired to change careers (from a strategic communications practice to flowers) after a Paris trip during which she became intrigued by French floral design and history. She studied French floral art in Paris, and extended her floristry training in Germany.

At home near Washington, D.C., Laura established her own floral business and design studio in a basement kitchen. After the resignation of the previous chief floral designer, a widely publicized White House Florist Competition commenced. Laura entered the search, and following the nation-wide competition she was selected by to be Chief Floral Designer at the White House in 2009.

A native of Chehalis, WA, Laura received an Associate of Arts degree from Centralia College, a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and master's degree in public administration from the University of Washington in Seattle. Prior to her White House assignment, Dowling was Senior Manager of Strategic Communications at The Nature Conservancy.

Laura is an annual presenter at the Philadelphia Flower Show, the nation's oldest and largest flower expo, as well as a regular speaker at national, regional and local horticultural associations, garden clubs and museums. Her flower designs have been featured in design magazines and on Home and Garden Television (HGTV).

Recent Honors and Endeavors.

Laura was commissioned by the U.S. Postal Service to design a collection of 4 holiday (USA Forever) wreath stamps that were launched nationwide on October 25, 2019.

Laura received the Great American Gardeners Award for achievements in floristry (2012) from the American Horticultural Society, and currently serves as a member of the organization's Board of Directors.

Floralien 2016 Ghent, Belgium. At the internationally renowned horticultural festival, Laura created a large installation, a stylized United States Capitol dome made of curly willow branches and hundreds of blue hyacinth plants in celebration of the theme "Floral Diplomacy."

The Royal Horticultural Society of Belgium named her "Distinguished Flower Ambassador," during a ceremony recognizing international diplomats and ambassadors in 2016.

TEDx Talk MidAtlantic.October 2016. Laura delivered a talk on the strategic and diplomatic power and potential of floristry and her experiences in the White House. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcUzE7t_3o8)