Adams Morgan Business Climate Benefiting from New Quality Retail, Services and Dining

By Anthony L. Harvey

For neighborhood-serving commercial establishments in Adams Morgan whose business models and offerings assume patrons from both the community and the Washington area generally, tourist traffic is the canary in the mine – its sound or appearance of tourists and business will be down, sometimes fatally, depending on the strength of the respective business and its capitalization and whether or not there was some larger factor at play, such as the recently completed reconstruction of 18th Street’s roadway and sidewalks.

And the recent 18th Street project (see, “Streetscape Project Completed; Adams Morgan Celebrates the New Look,” InTowner, August 2012 issue pdf, page 1.), as necessary as it was, played just that dead canary role for necessary as it was, played 2012 issue pdf, page 1.), as necessary as it was, played

DC History Feature Moved to Website
To access “What Once Was” (successor to the “Scenes from the Past” feature), click the link located on our home page. Being on our website allows for more extensive text & more images than was possible on our home page.

Cont., BUSINESS, p. 3

Dupont West Liquor License Limits Lifted For All ABC Categories Except Nightclubs

By P.L. Wolff

Front adopted by the Alcohol Beverage Control Board (ABC) in 1994 and amended several times, on August 12, 2015, the West Dupont Circle Moratorium Zone was, effectively, not further renewed by the Board when it ruled that only the prohibition on nightclub licenses and the existing restrictions and procedures regarding ABC-licensed establishments expanding into adjoining buildings would be continued for the next three years. The Dupont Circle ANC’s exhaustive outreach earlier this year to the community in the form of a thoughtfully prepared questionnaire and three well-attended public forums followed by its detailed filing with the ABC Board in May clearly convinced the Board to rule in the ANC’s favor for lifting virtually all the restrictions that had limited the numbers of restaurants and other

North Columbia Heights Losing Churches as Demographics Evolve, Though Some Stay

By Larry Ray

The North Columbia Heights (NCH) neighborhood is ever evolving, reflecting the transformation of the District of Columbia. What became of many of the churches is a telling part of this evolution.

The Early Years
The neighborhood is located in the northern portion of Ward One, with approximately 14,000 residents. The area’s boundaries are roughly Spring Road on the north, Kenyon Street on the south, 14th Street on the west, and Georgia Avenue on the east. Long ago, Ohio U.S. Senator John Sherman owned this square mile of land and sold it to developers in the late 1890s, which explains why 9th Street which runs through the neighborhood was re-named Sherman Avenue. (Sherman served in the Senate between 1861 and 1877 and again between 1881 and 1897; his brother was General William Tecumseh Sherman.)

During the early 1900s, developer advertisements urged potential homebuyers to flee the swamps and mosquitoes of downtown and move up to Columbia Heights. The neighborhood was founded by wealthy white Jewish folks. At 1121 Spring Road, there existed a Jewish home for the elderly which is now abandoned. The neighborhood began attracting African-Americans during the 1940s and for about 50 years, many homeowners abandoned the neighborhood and renters abounded. Then came real neighborhood progress around 2000. On 14th Street, the DC-USA mall opened along with a new Giant grocery on Park Road. (See, “Major Retail Center Finally Opens in Columbia Heights; Great Excitement Generated in Neighborhood and Citywide,” InTowner, March 2008, page 1.)

Developers and entrepreneurs began to explore 11th Street between Kenyon and Monroe Streets. At 11th and Park Road Red Rocks Pizza replaced what was reputed to have been a bordello 11 years ago; Wonderland Ballroom at 11th and Kenyon opened 10 years ago, Room 11, six years ago, and The Coupe, 3 years ago. The New York Times called 11th Street “the Hippest Section of DC.”

The Present
So, where do the churches fit into this milieu? Here is a quick summary with details to follow:

Trinity AME Zion Church (777 Morton Street) is closed and sold and is

bottom right.

photo—Larry Ray.
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From the Publisher’s Desk...

By P.L. Wolff

Law & Order: How Much Force Should Police Employ?

The recent chaotic appearance by Mayor Bowser in Southeast to publicly address the epidemic of gun violence in the city, largely in the poorer neighborhoods where jobs and services and amenities are seriously lacking, turned out to be a debacle of the first order. The crowd that joined with the press to (hopefully) hear from the Mayor an announcement of a real plan to deal with this was extremely disappointed, as was evidenced by the frustration that clearly boiled over.

Bowser informed the crowd that her plan is not “about arresting black men . . . but [about] how we can save their lives.” So far, so good. But, right after issuing that assurance, she revealed her plan that, as the highly respected long-time and insightful Washington Post columnist Courtland Milloy wrote, she “contradicted nearly everything she had just said.” What Milloy was struck by was her emphasis on putting more officers on the streets, giving them increased search and seizure authority and increased spending for things like GPS tracking and surveillance cameras.

But nothing about reaching beyond the obvious to find and employ more innovative approaches that could lead to an awakening of new attitudes and a lessening of despair so prevalent in those communities where prospects for decent jobs and fulfilling lives are absent.

Is calling for an approach that isn’t all about batons and worse along with police state-like technology naïve, “pie-in-the-sky” leftie nonsense or is there actual practicality leading to beneficial results?

Maybe so. We were much heartened by what Courtland Milloy reported in his column about what he heard from Erika Totten, one of the many attendants who was wearing a “Black Lives Matter” tee-shirt. “[S]he brought the District could try something similar to the homicide reduction plan in the Northern California city of Richmond. After identifying youths and young adults who were lynchpins in the city’s cycle of killing, Richmond paid them a monthly stipend of $300 to $1,000 to follow individually designed therapeutic education and job training programs for 18 months.

“That’s a drop in the bucket when you consider the cost of a single homicide. According to to a study published in a 2010 edition of the Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, the average cost per murder tops $17 million — when factoring in a variety economic impacts such as autopsies, police investigations, prosecution, incarceration and loss of lifetime earnings and family support.

“In Richmond, the result has been a 77 percent drop in homicides, from 47 in 2007 to 11 in 2014, according to city officials, not to mention more young black men in college and gainfully employed.”

We think this initiative that seems to be so successful in California, along with other similar ones (if there are any) might be seriously studied by the Mayor’s office, relevant DC agencies, and especially the City Council’s judiciary committee which has oversight jurisdiction for public safety matters.

And, in approaching this “assignment” that we urge be taken up, the bureaucrats and politicians ought deeply consider the question, reported by Milloy, that Erika Totten posed to him: “Why does DC always have to be so small-minded, thinking that it takes police to make a community safe?”

Excellent question indeed and it would be our hope that the question not be brushed aside.

Maybe we are not being fair to the Mayor. After all, she did state that her plan does not call for “unfettered authority to basically search anyone, anytime, anywhere.” The also stated that the plan includes “a neighborhood-focused approach that expands the community stabilization” with grants to “accountable community organizations” and to “trusted, effective individual community members who join us.” Pretty vague and, frankly, sounds like the usual technocratic, “let’s put more officers on the streets” mindset.

We join with Courtland Milloy in observing that “the reality [is] she had no plan.”

Now, we don’t want to leave our readers with the impression that MPD officers are of the shoot first, ask questions later school of maintaining law and order as in other cities — Baltimore and Cleveland come to mind. In fact, we cannot think of cases where MPD officers were in the habit of using their weapons by needlessly brandishing guns in the manner we’ve seen in the recent video shown on TV of a policeman — not from around here — who was with others called to bring order at a pool party being crashed by teens who had not been invited.

Thankfully, our police department and its officers is vastly more professional than what we have seen elsewhere. But the department cannot alone fix the hugely underlying problems that lead to all this gun violence. And neither is the answer just getting guns off the streets given that we are surrounded by states where getting guns is so easy and from where they so easily lead to all this gun violence.

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18 months.

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BUSINESS

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are anecdotally reporting steady — in spite of 2015’s severe winter weather — and recently rising receipts.

New retail shops, restaurants, and bars are opening, or posting signage proclaiming soon to open new or expanded establishments — filling presently vacant storefronts — and existing businesses are both expanding and creating new and similar shops, restaurants, and bars.

The heart of Adams Morgan’s 18th Street commercial and nightlife strip lies between Kalorama Road and Columbia Road togeth-

er with the strip’s immediate westward arm Columbia Road to Mintwood Place; it is the focus of this report. The bustling and thriving 18th Street and Florida Avenue nucleus of successful Adams Morgan businesses, and the relative-

ly somnambulant stretch — other than the Safeway and CVS — of Columbia Road to Mozart Place are different matters to be considered perhaps on another day.

18th Street from Kalorama Road to Columbia Road

New and expanding restaurants, bars, shops, and non-profits are the highlights in this core part of commercial 18th Street, with the newest bar being, by all accounts, the delightful, live-comedy themed “dive bar” named “High Dive,” which recently opened in the space previously occupied by Pharmacy Bar. The bar’s attractive young owners do not take themselves too seriously; they obviously enjoy the irony of “High Dive” as a name — as in high diving board — by choos-

ing a very attractive, sleek nautical design for the bar’s interior, complete with decorative port-

holes, and yet emphasis-

izing that their “dive bar” is a contrarian gesture in an age of the decline of dive bars — witness the clos-

ing of Chief Ike’s Mambo Room, a 23-year iconic Adams Morgan night spot on Columbia Road, and the recent shuttering of the popular Dr. Clock’s

Nowhere (dive) bar on the second floor above Rendezvous.

High Dive’s overriding themes are com-

edy acts during the week and a once-a-week open mike session. Beer and several mixed drinks are the menu — no food other than bar snacks — but patrons are invited to bring their own food. For those fearful of Adams Morgan losing its touch of “edginess,” the English basement level at the old Pharmacy Bar, which one accesses by a tiny concrete staircase, is a cave-like venue named DC Vape Joint; it is an emporium featuring elec-

tronic cigarettes and has a dusky dungeons and dragons sort of vibe that’s billed as a full service shop that includes a vape lounge.

A terrific Korean-American restaurant called BUL Korean has opened in the old, large space comprising storefronts formerly occupied by the notorious nightclub NY NY Diva. One storefront will be occupied by a new traditional restaurant with an ABC license — two firms are vying for the space — and the other is already taken and attractive signage in its shop windows announces the coming attraction to be a handsome adult lingerie shop. The community rejoiced at the departure of NY NY Diva when the building replicating the great poster by Aristide Bruant of Toulouse Lautrec and a defining historic district icon for which no competing signage would be allowed and that awnings were not allowed in the historic district. BUL seems to be working out its signage and outdoor seating prob-
lems. BUL’s food is reasonably priced, with amply sized portions that are engagingly presented; it is happily located next door to one of Adams Morgan’s favorites, the fine French bistro La Fourchette.

Across 18th Street from BUL is a magnifi-

cent new bike shop called Bicycle SPACE in the old Slaviya Restaurant and Lounge location (I can remember when the building housed Cities and before that Dance Place). Its large showroom-style plate glass win-

dows showcase an amazing array of terrific looking bikes, and the proprietors come to Adams Morgan with a great reputation for sales and service. It will become even more vital to the neighborhood if, as rumored, City Bikes decamps for larger quarters out-

side the neighborhood that reportedly will include space for both storage and repairs — space which City Bikes lost when the City Paper building on Champlain Street was demolished by the developers of the so-called Christian Science Church Historic Hotel building.

Also on the west side of 18th is another large space comprising storefronts formerly occupied by the notorious nightclubs NY NY Diva. One storefront will be occupied by a new traditional restaurant with an ABC license — two firms are vying for the space — and the other is already taken and attractive signage in its shop windows announces the coming attraction to be a handsome adult lingerie shop. The community rejoiced at the departure of NY NY Diva when the building shut it down in October of 2014 and that awnings were not allowed in the historic district. BUL seems to be working out its signage and outdoor seating problems. BUL’S food is reasonably priced, with amply sized portions that are engagingly presented; it is happily located next door to one of Adams Morgan’s favorites, the fine French bistro La Fourchette.

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BUSINESS
From p. 3

following its numerous health department, alcoholic beverage, fire code, and disorderly conduct violations.

Also on the west side of the street, closer toward Columbia Road is Donburi, a relatively new "Japanese rice bowls" eatery in the form of a single counter diner. The food is glorious, my favorite being the barbecued eel — a scrumptious dish. The panko coated shrimp and pork dishes are also outstanding, and the food is reasonably priced — both to eat at the counter and as takeout. Donburi has now received its beer and wine license and serves Saki and Japanese beer with its food — with a two-bottle limit per customer.

Directly across the street is another outstanding and relatively new restaurant, equally successful but larger, again with very reasonable prices. Its printed offerings are exquisitely spiced — with homemade buns, dumplings, broth, together with wonderful and ample portioned pork belly entrees. Always calm and crowded — but pleasantly so — and now expanding from its cozy and well-laid out English basement level to the main floor above.

The newest restaurant entrant on 18th Street, SONGBYRD, Café and Music House, is located on the first floor and a second level of the former Federal and District restaurant and nightclub — another notorious Adams Morgan night spot that lost its license. Its name celebrates the legendary Charlie Byrd, whose live performances in a earlier nightclub establishment at this location — the Showboat Lounge — electrified audiences with Byrd's unique acoustic guitar creations that fused and reflected traditions of folk, jazz, and bossa nova. SONGBYRD is a wonderfully ambitious establishment — already providing a coffeehouse environment serving delicious sandwiches and specialty coffee drinks, and offering such intriguing services as the sale of vintage vinyl records, a live, on-site, record recording capability, and with other complementary activities in the offering.

Columbia Road to Mintwood Place

Columbia Road immediately west of 18th Street has two new restaurants and an attractive retail store of note called URBAN DWELL, which is located in a handsome storefront in the recently built-out street level floor of the Alcazer apartment building. URBAN DWELL is chock full of attractively presented soft goods, primarily of small items — totes and leather goods, gift books and calendars, candles and gadget items for home, tee-shirts and clothing for children, and lots of games. It is very child and family friendly and has reasonable prices, notwithstanding its classic upscale appearance.

Several doors west from URBAN DWELL, at the corner with Mintwood Place is an outstanding Afghan restaurant that recently succeeded Napoleon, the French restaurant from the same proprietors. They have named their new establishment named Lapis after the beautiful blue semi-precious Lapis Lazuli stone of Afghanistan. I found the food is excellent, with the first three of five appetizers on a sampling menu from which I chose an onion and potato bolani, a spinach sambosa, and a shamee kebab to be absolutely extraordinary, as was the chutney sauce and white yogurt served with them. My main dish, the chicken kebab, was excellent, served on a seasoned skewer containing a generous portion of boneless chicken breast, all reasonably priced and graciously served.

The second of the two new restaurants, Pops Sea Bar, is closer to Columbia Road — next door to Cashion's Eat Place, another great favorite in Adams Morgan and the parent establishment of Pops. Oysters on the half shell and a variety of shell and fin fish fill a casual and relaxed oceanfront-style seafood restaurant and raw bar. The seafood I sampled was excellent, and the platters come with generous portions of sides, especially the fries. Catfish, red snapper, and crab cakes were the most popular items among those eating around me. Prices for the fish platters were modest, as were the portions of fish. Pops fills a real and important niche in Adams Morgan eateries.

With new establishments such as these joining with the terrific restaurants, retail shops, and bars already present in Adams Morgan, one can easily envision a coming renaissance in eating, entertainment, and shopping throughout the neighborhood's commercial strips.

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Advertisement
being replaced by million-dollar “hip, happening and historic” row houses. Southern Bethany Baptist Church (1001 Monroe Street) closed and sold for $1.5 million to be developed into seven condos; Mt. Rona Missionary Baptist Church (3451 13th Street) is transitioning to Forestville, Maryland and its building is up for sale at $36.6 million. Remaining in operation are the Park Road Community Church (1019 Park Road), the Salvation Army Church (3335 Sherman Avenue), and the Church of Latter Day Saints (3423 Holmead Place).

Trinity is being incorporated into the new Morton Street Mews project by Maryland-based developer Opal, LLC. Their ad promotes the “chance to live in a historic church passionately preserved and reimagined... Hip, happening and historic.” Roughhouses are priced from $700,000 to $1.4 million. The 1905 church building will be incorporated into the development. This church was designed by William Sydney Pittman, the first African-American to own his own architectural firm. He also designed Garfield Elementary School and the 12th Street YMCA. The son of a former slave, he married Portia, daughter of Booker T. Washington. Southern Bethany Baptist Church operating out of a free-standing house on the northwest corner of 10th and Monroe Streets. Except for parking issues, the church and neighborhood had a quiet, distant relationship. Most of the congregants were not of the neighborhood. The sale for $1,450,000 to a developer was completed on April 9, 2015 and the plan is to convert the property into a seven-unit condominium.

Mt. Rona Missionary Baptist Church, located at 1019 Park Road, community building is for sale. The church played a major neighborhood role in the 1980s and 1990s; adopting streets and parks and sponsoring neighborhood fairs. Commercial real estate brokerage NAI Michael is advertising this 9,600 square-foot property at $3.6 million.

The Salvation Army facility and church was built in 1965 and presently serves an African-American congregation of approximately 60 worshippers. Its billboard proclaims, “Yes, we are a church.”

Park Road Community Church was founded in 1931, through its present building dates from 1971. Its primarily African-American congregation is led by its first woman pastor in 80 years, Reverend Dr. Shirley B. Cooper. Most of the congregation lives outside the neighborhood and its members have not become too involved with neighborhood groups.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) operates quietly among residential row houses and apartment buildings. There was also a Rastafarian Church on 10th Street that has closed. So, in conclusion, as with churches throughout the country, those here in Washington must confront many challenges as participation in organized religion continues to diminish 70.6 percent, according to a report this year from the Pew Research Center, and seems to be decreasing one to two percent each year; further, 22.8 percent of U.S. adults say they don’t have a religious affiliation. And the group least likely to affiliate with organized religion is young professionals — the group which continues to see the District as the place to be. The city’s demographics are changing. The African-American population has decreased from a high of 80 percent to the present 49.5 percent. Yet, there are opportunities, such as congregations meeting in movie theaters and other non-traditional venues like the Ebenezer’s Coffee Shop church which attracts more than 100 worshippers at its services held in a renovated 1908 diner.

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- Commercial real estate
- Historic church conversion
- Retail is changing as more and more sales happen on line, and we are fully in the restaurant age. Lifting the moratorium will allow Pot Street to compete with other commercial areas.

LICENSE

From p. 1

licensed establishments, including taverns.

As the Board's order stated. It “gave great weight to the written recommendations of ANC 2B as required by law. And[,] [... a] fet evaluating all of the testimony and com-

ments, the Board [found] that ANC 2B's proposal is appropriate. Specifically, the Board agrees that maintaining the current cap on nightlife licenses is warranted to ensure that problems in the neighborhood are not exacerbated.”

If there was a single issue that required extra degree of consideration it was that the ANC did not also include continuing the six-limit for tavern licenses. The reason for that decision appears to have been predicated on the fact that of the six allowed, only four are presently in play and there have been no applications filed for the remaining two. Nevertheless, the Board's order makes clear that “if removing the cap on tavern licenses, the Board makes clear that it will not tolerate tavern licenses who operate in such a manner that their operations create a nightmarish atmosphere.”

Underlying the Board's action was its recog-
nition that, “[l]ike the ANC, [it] believes that if managed properly, a thriving and safe nightlife can act as an economic engine by attracting new businesses and restaurants, diversifying the range of cultural offerings, creating employment opportunities, and increasing tourism. To this end, the Board is in agreement with the ANC that a new direction for the West Dupont moratorium that allows for responsible growth is warranted.”

Echoing this sentiment, Bill McLeod, Historic Dupont Circle Main Streets' executive director, told The InTowner, “Retail is changing as more and more sales happen on line, and we are fully in the restaurant age. Lifting the moratorium will allow Pot Street to compete with other commercial areas.”

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In a sparkling and concise retrospective of the fascinating career of architect, designer, and master silversmith American expatriate in Mexico William Spratling, the Mexican Cultural Institute is hosting an exhibition that chronicles the development by Spratling of a new famous Mexican renaissance of the design, hand-crafting and workshop production of silver jewelry, tableware, reliquaries, and silver objects of all kinds — often decorated with precious stones and hand-carved ornamental wood in the small town of Taxco, south of Mexico City.

Spratling’s design focus was similar to that of his friend Diego Rivera, whose work Spratling promoted among wealthy American collectors and museums and included the patronage of the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Dwight Morrow, for whom Spratling secured commissions for Rivera to do the famous frescoes in Morrow’s home and the Cortes palace in nearby Cuernavaca.

Spratling’s artistic similarity to Rivera was based on the two artists reinterpreting in their respective work pre-Columbian design motifs and incorporating these motifs in modernist traditions such as those of the art nouveau and art deco movements. Equally important to Spratling was the development in Taxco of a high level of collaborative design and silversmithing skills among local artisans and the employment of these and other Mexican artisans in a cooperative workshop leading to the successful marketing of their creations.

Spratling noted the irony of the great wealth from the Taxco silver mines having provided the basis for launching of Mexico’s great domestic and international riches — especially that of the economic prosperity created by the role of Mexican silver bullion in the Far East and that precious metal — in great scarcity in China and southeast Asia — serving to establish the financial foundation for the cornucopia of wealth ensuing from the Manuela to Mexico trans-Pacific trade during the Vice Regal period of Mexican economic history. Little of that wealth, however, trickled down to the people of Taxco, and the extraordinary design and metal crafting prowess of the indigenous Mexicans — brought to its highest expression by Aztec silversmiths at the time of the Spanish conquest — fell into disuse. Spratling aimed to reverse this phenomenon with the establishment of his first workshop in Taxco in the early 1930s, having permanently settled in Mexico in 1929 and publishing in 1932 his Mexico tras lomita (“Little Mexico”) with a forward by Rivera.

By 1938, as noted in the pamphlet accompanying the exhibition, Spratling’s “workshop had over 100 employees and produced between 10 and 12 designs every week.” A system of production based on masters and apprentices was created and “internal mobility assured that smiths knew every step of the production process for each of the silver pieces, allowing specialization and, over time, the ability to attain the title of master silversmith.”

The results of Spratling’s fine arts designs and the collaborative workshop he established and led are beautifully displayed in the three well-lit galleries on the Institute’s first floor. The silver objects are interspersed among manuscript pages of original design drawings, photographs of Spratling’s workshop and employees, and scenes from Taxco and Spratling’s home — including a wonderfully cheeky picture of Spratling lying nude on his swimming pool diving board.

The exhibition is organized thematically and chronologicaly and displays the evolution of Spratling’s design skills as these developed over time and in collaboration with his Mexican silversmiths — from fundamental references to Mexican motifs to sophisticated design expressions of Mexican modernism.

The first gallery features examples of table-top silver utensils, an ingenious place setting of flatware, wide handled large silver bowls, a fascinating collection of pre-Columbian jewelry pieces — bracelets, buckle, and a stunning broach. A gorgeous formal silver service complements this array of design and artisanal excellence.

The second gallery features a pair of silver and ebony candlesticks and a show-stopping silver and malachite box. Photographs of Spratling’s Alaskan adventures — where he hoped to replicate his Mexican workshop success with a comparable set of workshops in Alaska that would feature carvings and sculptures reflecting Alaskan native design motifs, together with photographs of the Alaskan artisans working with Mexican counterparts in Taxco, are randomly displayed.

The third room caps off the Taxco workshops’ successes with a broadened use of materials, silver, carved wood and ebony, for example, used in a set of silver knives, amethyst inlay in precious objects, and a commanding silver and ebony letter opener in a succession of ever increasing sophistication in both design and silversmithing. Pins and broaches using great star designs, and the profile image of a jaguar head in necklaces and pins are among my favorites.

This engaging exhibition, which will remain on view through October 31st, is organized by the Mexican Cultural Institute “with,” as is noted in the catalog, "the enthusiastic collaboration of the Museo Franz Mayer, which houses the Alberto Ulrich Collection of Spratling’s works whose mission is to disseminate Spratling’s legacy. The catalog further notes the support of Consuelo and Violante Ulrich and that this terrific exhibition is curated by Ana Elena Mallet.

Embassy of Spain Arts & Culture
2801 16th St., NW; (202) 728-2334

In an informal setting on September 3, 2015 in the ballroom of the former residence of Spanish ambassadors to the United States on 16th Street in Adams Morgan, the Ambassador of Spain Ramon Gil-Casares graciously introduced Spain’s new Cultural Counselor Maria Molina and highlighted Spain Art & Culture’s fall and winter 2015 schedule of programs being offered throughout the U.S. and Canada. This ambitious
panoply of arts and cultural presentations includes programs dealing with architecture, heritage, design, film, visual arts, music, performing arts, literature, culture, and culinary arts.

Copies of the Embassy’s handsomely illustrated catalog were distributed to the press at this well-attended, early morning event which featured warm, deep-fried churros and thick Spanish hot chocolate. After brief summaries of architectural programs occurring in New York City during September, the catalog devotes four lushly illustrated pages to an extraordinary exhibition coming to Washington in December, titled “Designing America: Spain’s Architectural and Urban Cultural Legacy in the U.S.”

Organized and curated by noted architectural scholars in Madrid in collaboration with the National Library of Spain, the exhibition was first presented at the National Library in Madrid during 2014. As reflected in the scholarly catalog accompanying the exhibition at its initial showing, it is an immediately engaging presentation, both visually and intellectually stimulating. “Designing America” encapsulates through prints, photographs, maps, globes, and object labels the lively chronicle of Spain’s exploration and settlement of the North American southwest which together with Florida and Texas and the arc of territory on the Gulf of Mexico linking these two early parts of the eventual United States created a huge and wide northern belt to Spain’s Atlantic to Pacific colony of “New Spain.”

The exhibition focuses on those territorial achievements that left lasting and continuing cultural legacies: from those dealing with early land settlement, the development of missions, forts, and permanent civilian settlements, the fostering of agriculture and the introduction of livestock husbandry, the establishment of land and sea trade routes, the imposition of Spanish urban and rural legal, land planning and water rights; centuries-old religious, cultural and architectural traditions; the founding of permanent cities in these parts of the Spanish Empire, beginning with St. Augustine, Florida in 1565 and the continuing role of Spanish architects, engineers, and construction firms working in the United States both presently and during the past 20th and early 21st centuries.

The fascinating role of the Spanish language in this new world of North America — the part ultimately incorporated into the U.S. — is both an explicit and a sub-textual theme throughout the exhibition, as is that of Spain’s encounters with the indigenous peoples and early settlers from the U.S.

In light of the wild west wooliness of the current U.S. presidential primary races, the sober and challenging thoughtfulness of this exhibition could not be more timely; it opens on December 8, 2015 and will continue through February 28, 2016 at the former residence on 16th Street of the Spanish ambassadors to the U.S.

An immediate theatrical delight co-sponsored with GALA Hispanic Theater, Yerma (“Barren”), described in the catalog as “a contemporary take on the classic tale by Federico Garcia Lorca, adapted by Fernando J. Lopez” and performed by GALA through October 4th headlines the list of additional Spain Arts & Culture sponsored and co-sponsored programs in Washington, including the Library of Congress’s National Book Festival, the AFI Latin American Film Festival, and “All the Worlds a Stage: Photoweek 2015.” For more information visit www.spainculture.us/city/washington-dc or call the Cultural Office at (202) 728-2334.

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*Anthony L. Harvey is a collector of contemporary art, with an emphasis on Washington artists. He is a founding member of the Washington Review of the Arts. For many years he was the staff person in the United States Senate responsible for arts and Library of Congress oversight by the Senate’s Rules and Administration Committee and the House and Senate’s Joint Committee on the Library.*