



## MO Destinations: Washington DC BEYOND THE WHITE HOUSE

MO Destinations Washington

The pearls, the power suits, the president... Washington D.C. may be best known for its pomp and politics but the shopping is chic and modern, and a great way to tour the city

By Melissa Nix



*Pavement cafes are plentiful*



*Scandi style at Tone on Tone*

Washington D.C. has all the cosmopolitan trappings of a capital city but also carries the history of a Southern town. And while it boasts glamorous quarters and high-end fashion, it has pockets of boho-chic favoured by young designers and artists. These contrasting layers mix with cultural legacies: the district was an African-American entertainment mecca during Jim Crow (the name coined for the laws of racial segregation) and, in the 1980s, it grew a post-punk music scene to rival New York and London. This state of constant flux, innovation and eclecticism fuels a vibrant shopping scene today, with chic boutiques

and outlets for home-grown talent popping up in every neighbourhood.

**Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C.** is the perfect base from which to start your shopping tour. Its domed lobby echoes the rotunda of the nearby Jefferson Memorial, where the grounds are carpeted with cherry blossoms in spring. Take tea in the hotel lobby's Empress Lounge and admire Zhong-Yang Huang's painting, *Above Washington D.C.* (the whimsical piece depicts the Last Empress of China swinging over the Capitol, monkeys in tow).

Inspired, finish your oolong tea and head to Georgetown, the oldest part of Washington. The quarter predates the establishment of the Capitol itself, and comprises two main arteries: M Street (the 'Broadway of D.C.') and the quieter Wisconsin Avenue. Because of its great mix of national and international retail, destination restaurants and delightful boutiques, Georgetown's sidewalks are thronged most days of the week.

With two M Street shops between them, partners Marlene Hu Aldaba and Eric Eden could perhaps single-handedly turn the quarter into a destination on a par with Ginza. This year, **Hu's Shoes** was the only shop in the world, says Eden, that carried Maison Martin Margiela's 1980s-style periwinkle calfskin boot. Upping the ante are pairs by Givenchy, Chloé, Casadei and Alexander McQueen, as well as bags from Henry Cuir. A few blocks away, at **Hu's Wear**, you can find embroidered Manish Arora dresses, bright swimwear and maxis from Rosa Chá and Gaultier, plus Sonia Rykiel, Viktor & Rolf and Ter et Bantine.



*The Washington Monument*

---



*Eat gelato at Dolcenza*

---

Next, escape the crowds and stroll up Wisconsin Avenue, which soon sheds most of the large-scale stores in favour of the boutique. Survey picturesque north Georgetown with a left onto Prospect Street. You'll find a colonial village dating from the late-1700s. The quarter may look quaint – all cobblestones and shady trees – but it was once home to the city's slave market.

At P Street, stop in at **The Lantern** bookshop, to prep for your next tour abroad. The charming two-floor library brims with cultural histories, travel guides, and tomes on philosophy, art and architecture. A study of Hispano-Moresque textiles shares space with *Zen in the Art of the Tea Ceremony* and *The Golden Age of Finnish Art*. You'll be doing some good when you pick up that Silk Road guide, as all sales support the Bryn Mawr College scholarship fund.

Look into neighbouring townhouse **Poppy**, where custom-jeweller Heidi Hess transforms gold, sterling, gems and semi-precious stones into sculptural rings and pendants. D.C. architect Travis Price, known for his eco-modernist design, refurbished the shop for girlfriend Hess, who's as rosy and unpretentious as her nickname, the same as the shop.

Double back to Wisconsin Avenue for a peek into Ethan Drath's Georgetown establishment: the unisex **Sherman Pickey** offers classic American and British styles with a twist. The look, a quintessential D.C. style, is popular with Jackie O aspirants, men who sport bow ties without irony, and Capitol Hill interns with ribbons in their hair, but the fashions are relevant and fun for the non-prepster, too. Check out the Barbour waxed jackets, Lilly Pulitzer shifts, and whimsical needlepoint belts from local darlings Smathers & Branson.

A few blocks up, Wisconsin turns into a mini antiques district, with Danish mid-century on one side, for example, and a 19th-century continental market-cum-curio shop on the other. The latter wins your attention: Belgian linens with a coral motif? Check. Chandeliers from Les Puces? Check. A taxidermied wild boar? Check. 'We buy things we love,' says Jackie Dunn, who co-owns **Moss & Company** alongside creatives Susan Heston and Catharine Roberts. Patrons include White House designer Michael Smith, design duo Sills Huniford, and former First Lady Laura Bush, who often picked up pieces for the twins, Dunn says. No word on if Jenna or Barbara have stuffed boars of their very own.

---

*Patrons include White House designer Michael Smith*

---

If you've worked up a thirst, stop by **Bacchus Wine Cellar**, which specialises in rare champagnes, cult wines and small producers. The cosy cellar offers complimentary tastings on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, and owner Bassam Al-Kahouaji, who's used to catering to diplomats and celebrities, will arrange private tastings, too. Added bonus: chat and raise a glass with neighbouring shop owners, who often gather at Bacchus after closing time.

Continue north on Wisconsin and you'll come into the 'Rodeo Drive of the East'. Luxury retailers such as Saks, Neimans, Dior, Cartier, Bulgari and Gucci have set up shop in the upscale residential enclave, more formally known as Chevy Chase. Here, you'll encounter pro-athletes, lobbyists, well-heeled socialites and pretty young things with the wherewithal not to worry about maxing the plastic.

One of the most interesting diversions is **Roche-Bobois**, which has partnered with Kenzo, Missoni and Emanuel Ungaro to produce furniture featuring the house's iconic fabrics and sensibilities. The loveliest is Kenzo's jewel-toned take on the shop's signature modular sofa, the Mah Jong. Other stand-out Roche-Bobois pieces include playful takes on French chic: a Regency-style chair upholstered in grey damask with a floral appliqué of chartreuse velour; a Louis XVI-style dresser with a toile de Jouy finish; and a reinvented caramel leather Chesterfield sofa with exaggerated brass nails.

At **Barneys Co-Op**, scoop up Prova scarves, favoured by Michelle Obama, or modern, oversized cocktail rings in agate and rhodium from local line Manu. The shop also carries Band of Outsiders' trim, tailored suiting.

Five minutes' drive from here is Bethesda, Maryland. Once part of a well-established Native American thoroughfare, the Seneca Trail, the neighbourhood is now home to some of Greater Washington's most expensive real estate. Shopping here is more intimate in scale than in Chevy Chase, with stretches perfect for strolling. On the pedestrian-friendly Bethesda Lane, stop in at **Ginger**, which has stencilled tangerine and jade green walls that evoke a Marrakech tearoom. The shop stocks comfort and cocktail pieces from Yoana Baraschi and Joie, Linea Pelle bags and House of Harlow 1960 shoes. Don't miss the cherry-blossom-inspired diamond rings and gold relief cuffs designed by Charlottesville's Suzanne Somersall.

You need only cross Bethesda Lane for a bit more indulgence – the kind that puts you and your palate on a mini Roman holiday. Pans of creamy gelato beckon at **Dolcezza**, which makes its delicious fare using only local milk, eggs, fresh fruit and herbs. Go for a triple cone with scoops of lemon ricotta cardamom, Thai coconut milk and honey tangerine. Around the corner, **Tugooh Toys & Yiro** features artists' collaborations with French toymaker Vilac. Snap up Keith Haring dominoes, an Alexander Calder kangaroo or Yoshitomo Nara's wheeled dog, for that toddler who has everything.



If

#### Modern design store Muléh

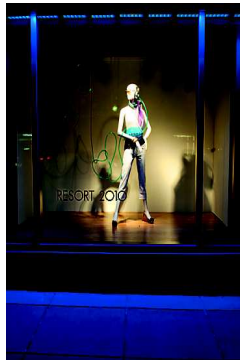
---

you prefer Ingmar Bergman to Fellini, Bryan Ferry to Bowie and sushi to ceviche, a visit to **Tone on Tone** is a must. The interiors shop eschews colour in favour of all things milky and neutral, especially 18th and 19th-century painted Scandinavian furniture. Owners Loi Thai and Thomas Troeschel, whose refined taste often lands them in *The Washington Post*'s home section, extend the conceit to ironstone dishes, patinated French mirrors, and all manner of muted home and garden paraphernalia.



From Bethesda, head south-east to D.C.'s hippest hood, the U Street Corridor, along which artists, epicureans and young shop owners have coalesced. Once known as 'America's Black Broadway', the area has long been a favoured spot for dancehalls and theatres. (Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday appeared at the now defunct Club Bali, while the Black Cat, the district's paramount indie music venue, continues to represent nearby.) The vibrant scene has revitalised the historic quarter, much of which burned down in riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King.

Shop owner Christopher Reiter brings his past into the present with the loft-like **Muléh**, meaning 'to come home' in Indonesian. (Christopher spent many years on the archipelago before making D.C. his home.) The airy space, which is more than likely to have a remix of Peter Bjorn and John, or MGMT, ping-pong off its whitewashed walls, carries a mix of high-end fashion and shoes, as well as cleverly organic home decor from South-East-Asia-based designers. A lamp made from silk cocoons will stop you dead in your tracks with its off-kilter beauty, as will a canopy of welded steel and bamboo branches.



*The latest fashion at  
Neiman Marcus*

---



*An in-store installation  
at Barney's Co-Op*

---

At **GoodWood**, the quarter's most celebrated furniture shop, Daniel and Anna Kahoe showcase well-priced vintage American treasures, such as an 1840s cupboard, art deco wardrobes and mid-20th-century ceramics. Come here for pieces of Americana, perhaps a chalkboard originating from a traditional, single-room New England schoolhouse, or a Pennsylvanian butcher's block for the kitchen. But don't wait to snap something up: because of the price point, college students can afford to shop at GoodWood – and because of the smartly curated selection, architects and designers do, too.

For a bit of a counterpoint, check out **RCKNDY** for fresh, witty furnishings reminiscent of the MoMA design store. Selections include sofas from Blu Dot and Gus, vintage French wall art, and burlap ottomans. RCKNDY also showcases designs by local artists, such as Gretchen Cook's hole-punched felt pillows. Shop here if you're hosting an urbanite cocktail party and your house has nothing to wear.

Blink and you'll miss it. (And you don't want to.) **Project4**, which shows site-specific art and design from a range of international artists, is lodged above an architectural firm, Inscape Studio. The gallery, which offers picture-window views of the city from its third-floor location, is a favourite of young collectors. Recent shows include Laurel Lukaszewski's ceramic installations: her curtain of porcelain 'ribbons' bisected the gallery, while porcelain cherry blossoms pinned to the walls seemed to cascade from corners, their fallen petals gracing the floorboards.

Across the Potomac River, in northern Virginia, explore Old Town Alexandria, which was once a colonial hot spot. George Washington surveyed the port town as a teen and frequented its taverns as an adult. The powdered wigs are gone, but much of the quarter's 18th-century charm remains. Trust-fund babes with horse farms, and ladies who lunch, stroll the quarter's brick sidewalks, favouring Fontaine for crêpes and coffee and tucked-away row-house shops for cocktail dresses and Burberry galoshes.

Just blocks from the river, women's boutique **Hysteria** tempts with pieces from Leifsdottir, Tory Burch and L.A.M.B., as well as resort wear from Roberta Freymann, Manuel Canovas and Calypso. Manager Alicia McCaslin, who's enthusiastic about local designers, also stocks beaten gold rings and gorgeous filigree cuffs from D.C. line Zephyre. If you're keen to save a pretty penny, snap up designers such as Nanette Lepore, Cynthia Steffe, Loeffler Randall and Bettye Muller at 30-50 per cent off at **Treat**. With labels this good, you'd never guess it's a sample shop.



*The Presidential Suite at Mandarin Oriental has three bedrooms and sweeping views of D.C.*

Smart Washington foodies make **La Cuisine** a habit. ‘We have what I believe to be the finest cookware – without all the bells and whistles – and hard-to-find ingredients,’ says owner Nancy Pollard, who opened the shop in 1970. Find your inner-Julia with Mauviel cookware, or marvel over Shun knives, Carrara marble mortar and pestles, *fleur de sel* from Brittany, and Caputo flour for perfect Neapolitan pizzas; Pollard orders the flour the only way possible, in 55-pound bags. Then she breaks it down for her customer – that’s her commitment to quality.

Round out your Old Town excursion by pampering your taste buds at speakeasy **PX** (note the blue light marking the entrance). The low-lit lounge, bedecked with mirrors and gauzy curtains, makes all its syrups, tonics and tinctures from scratch. Order the Third Course, made with foie gras-infused Armagnac, huckleberries and marjoram. Wickedly good, you’ll be tempted to order another. Instead, head back to Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. to enjoy late afternoon in the Asian Gardens, which look out over the Tidal

Basin. And in the fading light, you can just make out that storied dome...