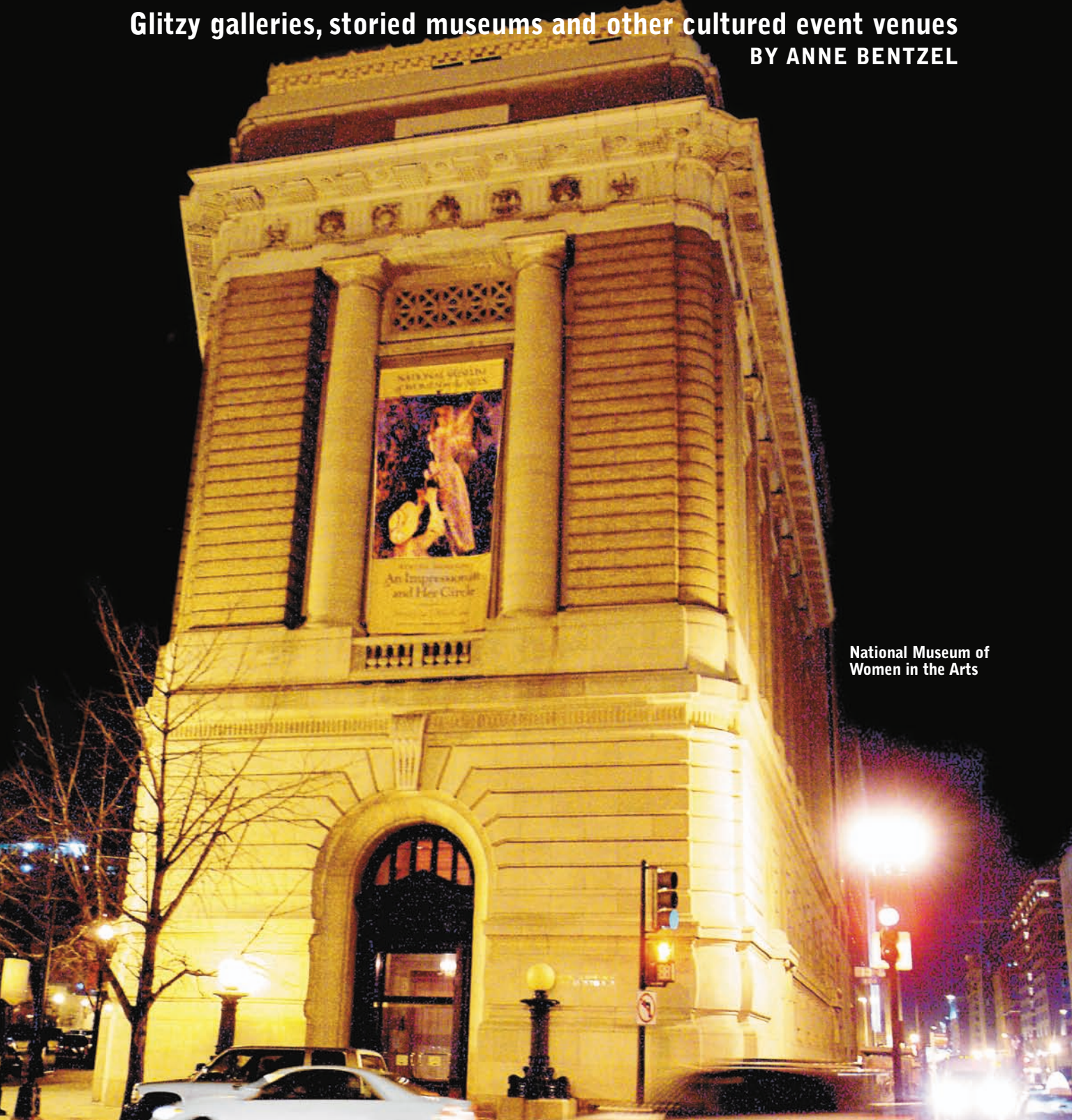


ARTY PARTIES

Glitzy galleries, storied museums and other cultured event venues

BY ANNE BENTZEL



National Museum of
Women in the Arts

Party guests mingle at the Textile Museum.



PABLO PICASSO once said, “Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life.” Perhaps those words offer a little wisdom for event planners. Why not surround your guests with art? That could mean Old Masters paintings at a storied museum or color-drenched contemporary canvases at a hip gallery. In any case, a truly unforgettable party just might unfold.

“D.C. art spaces offer a lively alternative to the drab reception rooms found in many of the city’s law offices, government buildings and business hotels,” says Allison Cohen, owner of Sightline, a D.C. art-consulting business. Cohen frequently hosts events at the city’s galleries and museums. “A company stands to gain favor among its members and in the public eye through affiliation with and support of a well-respected museum or gallery.” Here are several artful venues that offer elegant and casual spaces designed to impress.

ARLINGTON ARTS CENTER

This contemporary arts center showcases paintings, sculpture and photography by Mid-Atlantic artists. “We believe in providing new artists a chance to show their work,” says curator Carol Lukitsch. The center, located in a columned, 1910 elementary school, houses galleries, artist studios and classrooms, all spaces that provide room for diverse, large-scale exhibits. These include solo shows by artists like Allegra Marauarts, whose prints interpret

fabes and fairy tales, or Nancy Breslin, whose photographs explore the stories of people dining out. The Tiffany Gallery, with its colorful stained-glass windows, provides a glimmering backdrop for seated dinners or receptions. 3550 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Va., (703) 248-6800

ART MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAS

This quiet little museum at the west end of the National Mall houses 2,000 pieces of contemporary art from the 34 countries that belong to the Organization of American States. The collection, which emphasizes modern Latin American and Caribbean art, recently featured the optical works of Carlos Cruz-Diez and the intense color canvases of Cuban artist Amelia Pelaez.

The museum has the ambiance of a chic residence in Latin America. Built in 1912 as the residence for the Secretaries General of the OAS, the marble structure contains an indigo-tiled loggia with three arched French doors that open onto gardens. A statue of an Aztec god funnels water into a large garden pool surrounded by a balconied terrace. “Most of our



Above: A statue of an Aztec god overlooks a pool outside the Art Museum of the Americas at the Organization of American States. Right: The Phillips Collection hosts parties in an elegant mansion turned-museum-of-art (detail below).

parties are held here at the loggia and tented in the gardens,” gardens,” says Charo Marroquin who handles special events for the museum. “It offers a

setting that guests never forget.”

201 18th St NW, (202) 458-3349

KATHLEEN EWING GALLERY

Up a flight of stairs in a brownstone just north of Dupont Circle, this gallery shows serious vintage and contemporary photography. Kathleen Ewing opened the gallery in 1976 for exhibits that range from solo shows of contemporary photographers like Janos Enyedi’s industrial landscapes to works by 20th-century master shooters like Esther Bubley, Fred Maroon, Marion Post Wolcott and Aubrey Bodine.

Ewing’s space provides an eclectic, art-filled place for cocktail receptions and seated dinners for up to 100 people. Three wide, arched windows look out onto the bustle of Connecticut Avenue and flood the room with natural light. Live music by string quartets or solo performers is allowed. A recent expansion opens up a new rear reception area with an exposed brick wall. 1609 Connecticut Ave. NW, (202) 328-0955

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS



In the 1960s, Wilhelmina Cole Holladay and her husband Wallace F. Holladay began collecting art by women artists. Their legacy, the National Museum of Woman in the Arts in downtown D.C., now owns 3,000 works by female artists dating from the 16th century to today. The collection includes such jewels as Frida Kahlo’s self portrait, Camille Claudel’s bronze sculpture *Young Girl with a Sheaf* and Mary Cassatt’s

mother and child portrait *The Bath*.

The museum’s five-story Renaissance-Revival style building has a performance hall, library and café. The Great Hall and mezzanine feature a luxurious

marble floor, grand sweeping staircase and three showy crystal chandeliers. These spaces allow for large-scale, lavish receptions for up to 1,000 people. Guests can wander through the galleries checking out both the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions like *The Mystique of Sandalwood*, a show of screens, furniture and sculpture made by women artists from Beijing, on view through December 4, 2005.

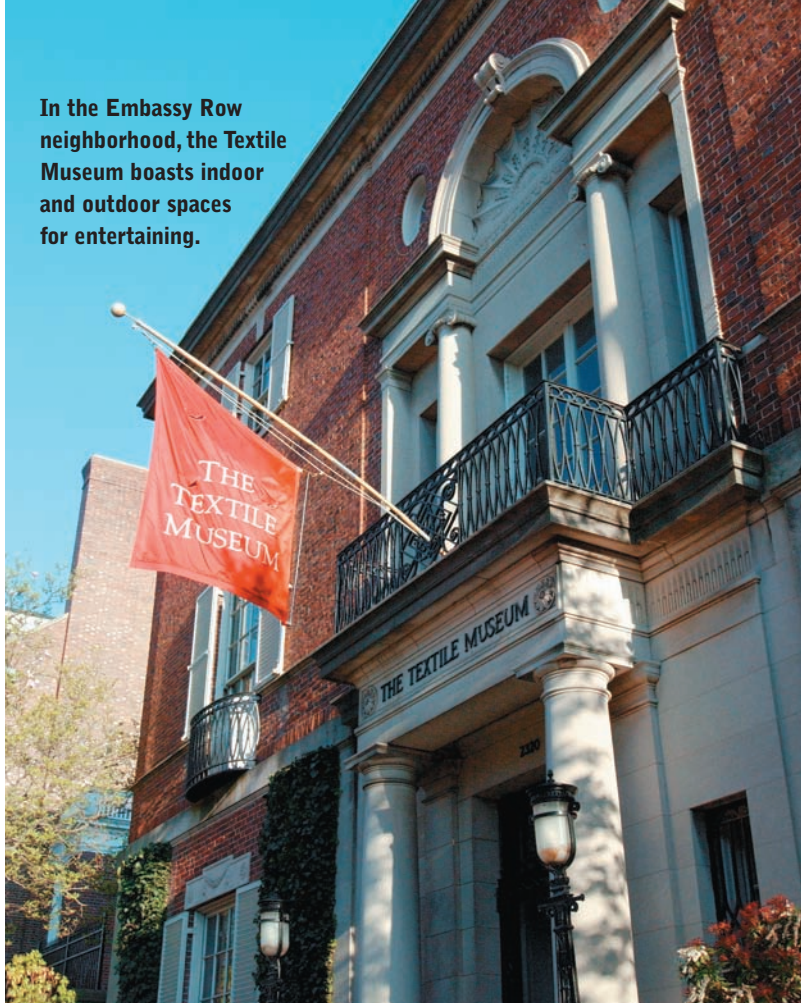
1250 New York Ave. NW, (202) 783-7366

NORMAN PARISH GALLERY

After retiring from a career as a computer graphics engineer, Norman Parish opened his gallery in 1991 in Georgetown’s stylish Canal Square. “I always had this thing in my heart. I knew I had to try running a gallery before I died,” says Parish, who holds a degree in painting from the Art Institute of Chicago. He focuses on mid-career artists and emerging talents. Parish’s exhibits often feature works by contemporary artists from Africa or the African Diaspora.

Parish opens his gallery’s single space for cocktail receptions and other events. The gallery’s floor-to-ceiling windows look out on a quiet, redbrick courtyard surrounded by other galleries.

In the Embassy Row neighborhood, the Textile Museum boasts indoor and outdoor spaces for entertaining.



1054 31st St. NW, (202) 944-2310

PHILLIPS COLLECTION

In 1921, collector Duncan Phillips opened the doors of his Dupont Circle mansion to share his collection of art by “modern” artists and their antecedents. His inventory included paintings by El Greco, Renoir, Manet, Klimt and Georgia O’Keeffe. Today the Phillips Collection has more than 2,000 works, including Renoir’s famed *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. Masters such as van Gogh, Picasso and Monet show up on the walls of the intimate space. The museum allows corporate members who make large donations to host standing receptions for up to 400 and seated dinners for up to 100 in its music room.

1600 21st St. NW, (202) 387-2151

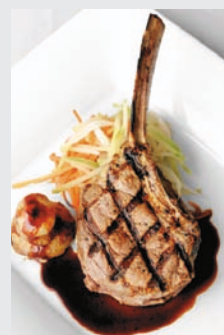
TEXTILE MUSEUM

Housed in an elegant 1912 mansion designed by John Russell Pope, architect of the Jefferson Memorial and the National Gallery of Art, the Textile Museum displays ancient embroidered silk caftans, contemporary silk-screened kimono and oriental carpets dating to 3,000 B.C. Museum founder George Hewitt Myers became fascinated by such material when he bought an oriental rug for his dorm room at Yale University. His collection grew to encompass textiles, rugs and other items from around the globe. In 1925, Myers founded the museum, eventually donating his neo-classical S Street mansion to house the collection.

The museum rents its spaces for stylish soirées. Guests enter via a formal foyer, and beyond wall-length French doors, they mingle over cocktails in



PALETTE RESTAURANT



A sleek D.C. eatery, Palette dubs itself the city’s first fully realized restaurant-cum-gallery. Blond wood and neutral tones set off contemporary art. The restaurant partners with

galleries such as Georgetown’s Ralls Collection and with curators to provide rotating shows.

Chef James Clark plans menus to complement the art on exhibit. For *American Spirit* featuring works by contemporary American artists, Clark created regional dishes like Carolina-style shrimp with grits and chile-rubbed quail. During an exhibit of works by Native American artists, Clark featured rattlesnake and fry bread. Art-inspired cocktails include the “Fonseca” of Finlandia vodka, Midori and honeydew, named for abstract painter Caio Fonseca whose painting hangs by the bar.

Arts organizations like the Corcoran Gallery of Art frequently book the restaurant for private events. Palette provides a small, gold-walled private space and a large rear dining room that closes for special events. *15th and M sts. NW, (202) 587-2700*