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# Washington's U Street takes a U-turn

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It was once known as “the Black Broadway.” Washington's U Street is a nexus of African-American history and culture. In the early years of the century there was no more glamorous place for nightlife, as its clubs and theatres hosted the likes of Pearl Bailey, Billie Holiday, and native son Duke Ellington.

The neighbourhood has survived riots and economic hard times over the past few decades, but today the lustre is back. Dozens of chic boutiques, eateries and clubs are popping up. “We're not like L.A. [or] Miami. ... U Street is like Williamsburg, Brooklyn,” says Ian Hilton, co-owner of Marvin, a local bistro. “Everything here is real and raw and independent.” D.C.'s style setters seem to agree. On U, the joints are jumpin' again, and everyone from kids to the old guard seems excited.

## WELCOME TO U ALL

Kick off your visit with a stop at the Greater U Street Neighborhood Visitor Center (1211 U Street NW). Browse the historic panels with images, tales and a timeline of the old neighbourhood. If you haven't downloaded the U Street audio tour (at [www.CulturalTourismDC.org](http://www.CulturalTourismDC.org)), a heritage trail brochure is available. There are a dozen historical spots to see, but three not-to-be-missed landmarks are the African-American Civil War Museum (1200 U St. NW; 202-667-2667; [www.afroamcivilwar.org](http://www.afroamcivilwar.org)); the gloriously restored 1920s Lincoln Theatre (1215 U St. NW; 202-328-6000; [www.thelincolntheatre.org](http://www.thelincolntheatre.org)); and the vibrant family-owned Ben's Chili Bowl (1213 U St. NW; 202-667-0909; [www.benschilibowl.com](http://www.benschilibowl.com)) just below the Visitor Center, where for a half century the famous and everyone else have been dropping by for Washington's signature snack, the chili half-smoke (sausage and chili on a bun).

## ARTS AND MINDS

Transformer, a vest-pocket-sized but influential artists' space, is helping transform an area whose main claim to art used to be graffiti murals on abandoned buildings. Lately it has been filled with the work of Winnipeg wunderkind Mia Feuer. Her colourful, floor-to-ceiling installation evoking an industrial landscape will be at the gallery until April 17. With about a half dozen shows a year, Transformer's storefront art projects are always pushing the envelope. *1404 P Street NW; 202-483-1102; [www.transformergallery.org](http://www.transformergallery.org).*

## SMALL PLATES AND TEQUILA

The hip transitional neighbourhood boasts its first really stylish chef-owned eaterie, Masa 14. Folks aren't exactly flocking in from the suburbs to this area yet, but the new Latin-Asian small plates has a rep for luring in the city's best-looking boys and girls on date night. With simple exposed brick walls and a concrete floor, it has a warehouse feel but still manages to be cozy. Menu highlights include the wok-fried okra with chipotle aioli and Wagyu brisket in a peppery achiote citrus sauce. And do make time for Masa's 20-metre-long bar (reputedly the longest in Washington) where tequila lovers applaud the 150 brands of Mexican spirits on tap. *1825 14th Street NW; 202-328-1414; [www.masa14.com](http://www.masa14.com)*

## HIDDEN TREASURY

Forget Tim Geithner. Treasury is a vintage store and events venue where the boys and girls (and the boys who want to be girls) play dress-up. From lingerie and lipsticks for the ladies of Mad Men to skinny ties and twenties tuxes for the gents, Treasury is a veritable treasure hunt. Visitors connected to the embassy party crowd will love the lacy black fifties bombshell sheath and the coral silk chiffon pouffy gown. Owner Katerina Herodotou has raided estate sales of diplomats' homes for clothes and baubles from the last century's great (and not so great) fashion moments. But that's not all. A follower of what she calls "social retail," the fashion-backward Herodotou throws DJ-hosted weekly parties. *1843 14th Street NW; 202-506-6908; [www.shoptreasury.com](http://www.shoptreasury.com)*

## CHEEKY AND CHIC-Y

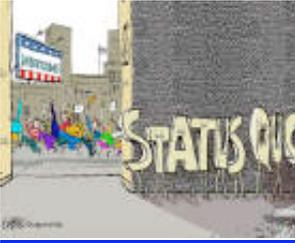
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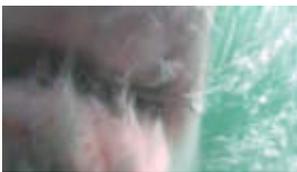
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