

# Capital Creatives

Among the lawyers and lobbyists, D.C.'s free spirits take flight.

*By Jennifer Barger*



SCROLL THROUGH THE INSTAGRAM feed of @aCreativeDC, and the colorful barrage of street murals, local fashion designers and homegrown art looks far from any stuffy meeting rooms or a posse of lawyers in pinstripes. Since the initiative launched, over a million people have used its hashtag to capture a Washington world of dancers, painters and creators that's surprising in both diversity and general groovy-ness.

### DANCERS, PAINTERS & CREATORS

"D.C.'s arts and creative scene isn't what people think, and it's often surprising," says longtime Washington Ballet dancer Sona Kharatian. "You can go to a big Broadway show or to see a completely unknown dance company." Case in point: You can catch Kharatian in the ballet's staging of "Sleeping Beauty" March 1-3 at the Kennedy Center (2700 F St. NW, [www.washingtonballet.org](http://www.washingtonballet.org)) or head to the alternative Dance Place (3225 8th St. NE, [www.danceplace.org](http://www.danceplace.org)) for Los Angeles' Latino-fusion troupe Contra-Tiempo March 15-16.

In an urban area so jazzed on both high culture (the National Gallery of Art, Kennedy Center) and up-and-coming efforts, it's easy to find and interact with some of the capital city's edgiest creatives in other ways.

For visual arts, hit the streets, checking out the mural-strewn walls and buildings of the Shaw neighborhood. Highlights include the alley next to Ben's Chili Bowl (1213 U St. NW, [www.benschilibowl.com](http://www.benschilibowl.com)) with paintings of famed African-Americans including Jesse Jackson, the Obamas and Prince, and Blagden Alley (between 10th and 11th streets NW and M and N streets) hosts multiple images on garage doors and brick walls in what's known as the DC Alley Museum. "And I love going to Union Market," adds Kharatian. "The food inside is as inspiring as the murals outside."

Local creative powers also headline at Washington's buzziest restaurants. Take architect Eric Gronning, whose ability to meld good design with good eating spaces shows up in hot spots like Spring Valley's new Pizzeria Paradiso (4850 Massachusetts Ave. NW, [www.eatyourpizza.com](http://www.eatyourpizza.com)), with its interior trellises and Miro-esque, primary-hued wall mural, and Penn Quarter's temple to Span-

ish tapas, Jaleo (480 7th St. NW, [www.jaleo.com](http://www.jaleo.com)), the flagship of another D.C. original, celebrated celebrity chef José Andrés. At Jaleo, you can chow down at foosball dining tables under outsized, are-we-in-Barcelona? bright hex tiles. "I don't know that we have a D.C. design style," says Gronning. "I think of it as more international. We're a port city, with a lot of people coming in and out and a lot of ideas flowing."

Petworth upholstery designer Nicole Crowder also draws energy from what she sees at local dining spots. "There's so much bold use of color, like at The Line Hotel in Adams Morgan, there are these unexpected pops of wallpaper," she says. "A big part of my aesthetic is mixing prints on chairs, so it's nice to see other people doing it."

Crowder, who just launched her eponymous furniture, fabric and art showroom (3015 Georgia Ave. NW, [www.nicolecrowderupholstery.com](http://www.nicolecrowderupholstery.com)), is one of a burgeoning tribe of visual and design entrepreneurs opening new spaces despite the District's Washington Monument-high rents. Among her faves: local designer Ron David's women's clothing and handbags in a snug space at the Four Seasons in Georgetown (2800 M St. NW, [www.shoprondavid.com](http://www.shoprondavid.com)) and the new, nearby flower and gift boutique She Loves Me (808 Upshur St. NW, [www.shelovesmedc.com](http://www.shelovesmedc.com)).

"There are a lot more creatives in this city than outside people understand," says local suit designer and showroom owner Sim Kahn, who puts local guys in custom, far-from-frumpy suits at his appointment-only Brimble & Clark atelier (811 4th St. NW, Loft 719, [www.brimbleandclark.com](http://www.brimbleandclark.com)) in the Mt. Vernon Triangle neighborhood. "There are so many entrepreneurs and people interested in design."



### RESIDENT ARTISTS

(From top) Sim Kahn (right); Nicole Crowder; Sona Kharatian; (Opposite) Eric Gronning's work at Jaleo in Penn Quarter

(FROM TOP) ©RASHIED SCARLETT PHOTOGRAPHY; ©ERIKA LAYNE; ©DEAN ALEXANDER; (OPPOSITE PAGE) ©GREG POWERS